

“This Stage of Woe”:
The Petrarchanism of Mary Wroth

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Abstract

Mary Wroth, the first Englishwoman to write a Petrarchan sonnet sequence, creates a counterdiscourse which comments on and contributes to English love poetry. Pamphilia to Amphilanthus is addressed from a female lover to a male beloved, and this thesis discusses the implications of this unusual Petrarchan gender configuration. It explores the ways in which Wroth's Pamphilia encounters, is affected by, and alters, the poetics of English Petrarchanism, showing how English Petrarchanism had developed into a discourse that assumed a male poet and a female addressee. By paying attention to Wroth's socio-historical context, as well as her genre, I discuss how and why Pamphilia encounters elements of English Petrarchanism that do not easily allow for a female speaker. Illustrating that gendered subjectivities form the basis of English Petrarchan poetics, I show how this is relevant in terms of the gender climate of the Renaissance. By paying attention to common-sense assumptions about 'appropriate' female behaviour, and the dynamics of the public performance that (especially Petrarchan) writing entailed, I explore the implications for Pamphilia, and her responses. I show that a female poet had different access to many of the poetic and social assumptions of Petrarchanism and of Renaissance society, which affects what she can say, and how she can say it. I look at Pamphilia's interactions with the relentlessly public world of a courtly love poet, and explore how her gender complicates her position as a Petrarchan subject. I am concerned with poetic and political aspects typical of Petrarchanism. These include the role of the beloved; the lover's emotional isolation; the multifaceted nature of Petrarchan desire, both erotic and socio-political; the importance of the gaze and the symbol of the eye; and the drive within Petrarchanism for the poet's constitution of selfhood. I discuss how these are encountered by Pamphilia in ways that illustrate the gendered nature of English Petrarchanism, and the social dangers faced by a female poet expressing Petrarchan concerns. I try to prove that, because of her female subjectivity, Pamphilia shows how the Petrarchanism she inherited does not easily allow for the constitution of a female poetic subject. In addition, I am concerned with the ways in which Wroth interrogates the notion of a private space from which a woman can write, if she is barred from speaking, desiring, and performing publicly. I pay attention to the fact that her poetry

enacts an internal, private movement, but discuss how, through her exploration of Love, she shows that even apparently insulated subjective space is defined by external context. In summary, this thesis attempts to illustrate how and why Pamphilia cannot assume many aspects 'typical' of Petrarchan subjectivity because of her gender. I claim that Petrarchanism as a poetic form is capable of expressing a female subject's experience, but also that Wroth's literary inheritance and prevailing Renaissance ideology complicate a female poet's entry into English Petrarchanism. This thesis is concerned with exploring the ways in which Wroth reveals the gendered nature of English Petrarchanism, and changes aspects of the discourse as she explores the implications for a woman of loving within a Petrarchan and Renaissance context.

Interior

Her mind lived in a quiet room,
A narrow room, and tall,
With pretty lamps to quench the gloom
And mottoes on the wall.

There all the things are waxen neat
And set in decorous lines;
And there are posies, round and sweet,
And little, straightened vines.

Her mind lives tidily, apart
From cold and noise and pain,
And bolts the door against her heart,
Out wailing in the rain.

Dorothy Parker

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction: Gender and Petrarchanism.....	1
Chapter 2 “May I such one wed”: The Renaissance Gender Climate Debate.....	32
Chapter 3 “Petrarke hed and prince”: Inheritance and Interaction in Wroth’s Sonnets.....	58
Chapter 4 “There was a woman known to be so bold”: The Problems with Speaking Desire.....	100
Chapter 5 “You who are a... God”: Watching Eyes Watching Eyes like the Sun.....	128
Chapter 6 “The most excellent natural cure”: Negotiations with the God Love.....	156
Conclusion.....	191
Bibliography.....	197

Chapter 1 Introduction: Gender and Petrarchanism

“Because great things by reason of my sexe, I may not doe, and that which I may, I ought to doe, I have according to my duty, brought my poore basket of stones to the strengthening of the walls of that Jerusalem, whereof (by Grace) we are all both
Citizens and members”

-Ann Locke, “who left England and her husband to work with John Knox on the continent”¹

Ann Locke was a woman who put her personal faith before what she had been told by her society was her social responsibility and her correct place. Her words are thus an appropriate epitaph for a discussion of the poetry of Mary Wroth. Wroth, too, in her life and in her work, transgressed that which her society believed, by reason of her sex, she may not do, and in the process brought a basket of stones to the building of the New Jerusalem of poetic works by women writers in the early modern period. The project of this thesis is to examine Wroth’s seventeenth-century sonnet sequence Pamphilia to Amphilanthus, in order to explicate the workings of its female poetic subjectivity.

“The possibility of criticism rests on the most insecure of bases, the endless decipherability of texts - and their endless withholding of ultimate answers. Texts are as unreadable as they are readable.”² This is Jonathan Goldberg’s postmodern assessment of the critical activity. The ultimate undecipherability of texts is made doubly difficult when approaching the texts of another period, whose cultural assumptions we can only access through the texts themselves, and via our own ideologies. Pamphilia to Amphilanthus is a Renaissance collection of Petrarchan poems written by a woman, who is a member of the gender group whose voices are further muffled for us by the sexist ideology of the early modern period. Thus to begin to approach a reading of a text by a woman, especially in a way that attempts to take cultural and social conditions into account, is to encounter a labyrinth of (im)possible meaning. To enter the maze consists of trying to make meaning, influenced by my own cultural ideology, and feminism and its complex history of textual and social criticism. In addition, the rich history of the Petrarchan form and its equally rich

¹ From the dedication of her translation of the *Markes of the Children of God*, qtd. Tina Krontiris, Oppositional Voices: Women as Writers and Translators of Literature in the English Renaissance (London: Routledge, 1992), 10.

² Jonathan Goldberg, Voice Terminal Echo: Postmodernism and English Renaissance Texts (New York: Methuen, 1986), 7.

critical reception must be encountered. Renaissance practices which can be accessed only through texts, and through our own critical methods of understanding, and in the process, making, history, also form part of this maze. This is a procedure whose end leads me back to the beginning. Therefore I will try to account for the nature of the thread I will use to attempt to get me through this labyrinth, an activity which replicates Wroth's persona, Pamphilia's, attempts to write her way out of the maze of Petrarchan love in which she finds herself in her sonnets.

The first steps lead me to a discussion of subjectivities, both early modern and modern. I use the term subjectivity to refer to the notion of personal identity that is expressed through a particular voice, in a way that reflects a certain sense of self. Therefore the quest to understand how and why Pamphilia's Petrarchan subjectivity is affected by her gender entails looking at the way she expresses herself within, and is expressed by, Petrarchan discourse. Subjectivity can also be created through discourse for specific purposes, and thus a poet can create a notion of another's subjectivity in order to construct an ideal object for his/her poetry. Such a mode of subject-creation can be seen in the ways in which Petrarchanism in early modern England was used to create a female beloved. The female 'subject' thus invented, who functioned as the object of the Petrarchan address, did not necessarily reflect the realities of individual, historical, female experiences. The female subject expressed in such poetry is a fiction in the true sense (because it may be argued that all subject creation, in literature or on life, is in some ways a fiction). In the case of the historical usage of English Petrarchanism, the female subject created by the poet often reflects more about the creator than it ever can about the woman (historically real and/or poetically invented) that it describes. Similarly, a subject position is that which is partly chosen by, and partly constituted for, a subject when s/he begins to speak. The degree of agency exerted in the creation or assumption of a subject position is a variable. It depends on the cultural inheritance of a particular subject, as well as on that subject's compliance with or resistance to his/her cultural ideologies. It is not my intention to enter into the debate on the amount of agency afforded any speaking voice within the complex matrixes of power created by language and culture. I also do not want to attempt to solve the labyrinthine problem of where subjectivity begins and language and ideology leave off, and which comes first. This is a complex maze indeed, and a thesis in itself. Instead, I wish to make the point that I believe one of the constituting factors of

Petrarchan subjectivity is gender, a statement I will attempt to prove in the course of my discussion on Wroth's poetry in chapters three to six. My argument begins therefore, with the idea that the "traditional" notion of the speaking English Petrarchan subject (taking into account that to speak of traditional Petrarchanism is a generalisation within a discourse that was used so prolifically and to such varied purpose), as Wroth inherited it, was male in many fundamental ways. This had specific consequences for a woman writing the first English female Petrarchan lover.

Petrarchanism had developed into a discourse that, by the time Wroth wrote her Petrarchan sequence, had been used in England only by men to express notions of erotic and political desire. The workings of Petrarchanism had become gendered in specific ways, which began with the creation of a female beloved that was a construct formulated for the purposes of her male lover. This amounted to a process of the appropriation of a kind of female subject. So the type of Petrarchan discourse that Wroth's persona encounters has amassed a poetic and metaphorical vocabulary that has certain implications for the gender of its speaker. This will be more fully discussed in chapters three to six. For the purposes of this introductory chapter I will investigate the implications of the terms used in my discussion about Petrarchan subjectivity, language, and gender.

The definition of forces of oppression, and the question of whether we can ever get beyond them if they are created by and in our language, is as impossible to quantify exactly as the notion of any final origin or end-point for subjectivity. More important, and more useful, is the realization that, whatever the chosen boundaries of the terms, even fragmented subjectivities within a matrix of constituting and constituted forces are created out of and into gendered positions. This is true regardless of whether the notions of gender and gender designations are defined as based on sex, difference, absence, or appropriation. I do believe that in many ways the subject cannot get beyond language to a point outside history and its discourses. Nevertheless, the question of the relationship between subjectivity and language is a complex one. In the theoretical outline that follows I am not implying the existence of an end-point outside of or behind all these forces, or assuming that specifically Petrarchan language can always only create one kind of subjectivity. But practically, in the language we use, we do, however artificially, create subject positions all the time. This is not to suggest that we do not also occupy subject positions created by the

language and culture we have inherited from our society. Indeed, as I try to illustrate in chapters four and five, Wroth's Pamphilia is as constrained by certain rules governing the correct behaviour of a woman as she is free to subvert them. Wroth forges a subjectivity in her sonnets that is in some way different to the usual workings of English Petrarchanism, a difference that I believe can be understood by taking gender into account. That we can never exactly quantify gender or its relation to identity formation does not preclude the existence of gendered subjectivities. In other words, just as the notion of subjectivity must include the awareness that subjectivity itself is never a unified, centralized, pre-linguistic entity, and is always in flux, so must it also include the awareness that it is, by virtue of being composed of and in language, of and in culture, always gendered, even if that too is always in flux. To deny this fact is to deny the specific cultural matrixes in which poetry is written; it is to universalize subjectivity as male subjectivity; to refuse the chance to break the silence, which is the only step towards breaking or renegotiating the gender binary. This gender binary was firmly in place, at least theoretically, during the early modern period, as I will argue in chapter two. Therefore Wroth, speaking as a woman through Pamphilia, also a woman, is affected in certain ways by the Petrarchan language she utilises. Wroth has a different degree of access to the historical assumptions behind and within Petrarchanism, a difference that is related to the historical realities of the time, as well as to the textual workings that had come to predominate within the genre itself. To speak as Other is always to speak problematically, negatively; but to speak at all is the first step.

This leads inevitably to the unanswerable question about alternatives to patriarchal language, about the ability to say anything that is not in patriarchy's script (that is, in the language it wants to use in specific ways, and to make available in specific ways, to affect and effect a subject's formation of him/herself) if one is speaking always as subaltern. (Patriarchy is a term used in a very general sense, for convenience sake, to signify all the matrixes of gender-oppression cross-culturally and historically).³ Again, I do not wish to enter into a discussion about the nature of

³ What is patriarchy? Judith Butler sees the notion of a universal oppressive force accompanying the by-now-outdated idea that there is a universal notion of 'woman.' She points out that such a conceptualisation of patriarchy fails "to account for the workings of gender oppression in the concrete cultural contexts in which it exists." Furthermore, such a notion has been criticised "for its efforts to colonize and appropriate non-Western cultures to support highly Western notions of

language as a whole, and whether or not it can always only be patriarchal. Rather, I would like to point out that when a speaker takes into account the differences engineered within a subjectivity when gender is recognised as a site of some sort of difference, s/he avoids the over-writing of differences of experience. This experience can encompass a subject's encounters with language, love, and identity formation by and through the language of love. We may, in other words, at least take responsibility for engaging in a critical discourse that is not unconsciously 'patriarchal,' that will not quickly disallow any alternative to its speaking norm, that will not blindly speak *for*. Wroth's Pamphilia, the speaking subject of the sonnet sequence Pamphilia to Amphilanthus, may struggle with the assumptions she finds in English Petrarchanism, as I will discuss particularly in chapter three, but her expression, even if it is only of that experience (and it is not), points out, shows up, the gendered nature of Petrarchan subjectivity.

But the notion of a gendered subjectivity, particularly in the context of a discussion that wants to acknowledge that there is a difference implicit in something called female subjectivity, risks sounding naive. Any invocation of gender-based difference can seem to be asking for the 'correct' representation of what Butler calls the "category of woman." A discussion that assumes "a language which is said either to reveal or to distort what is assumed to be true about the category of woman"⁴ would thus ensue. The notions of an ultimate 'truth' behind language and of any one primary notion of 'woman' are theoretically simplistic, denying as they do the differences in meaning and culture behind any identity matrix. Within Petrarchanism specifically, since the notion of woman within this discourse *is* such a specific construct, there can be no bottom-line 'truth', no expression of 'women' within the tradition that speaks for a 'reality' outside of the tradition. Rather, Wroth must create, from within a patriarchal society, language and convention, a workable personal notion of the poetic self. That Pamphilia struggles to express such a self in terms other than the internal, even *as* the internal (although this concept, too, is interrogated by Wroth's poetry, as will be seen), is not surprising, especially considering the lack of

oppression" (Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity [New York: Routledge, 1990], 3).

⁴ Gender Trouble, 1.

poetic predecessors, or what Elaine Beilin calls rolemodels.⁵ Indeed, my aim is not to enter into the debate about whether or not a finite notion of woman or female identity or feminine poetic subjectivity can ever be approached, but rather to examine identity constructs within the specific system of Petrarchanism.

Picking up on some of the issues in the ongoing feminist debate around defining gender and subjectivities, Heather Dubrow points out that a major problem inherent in defining Petrarchan dynamics as operating in terms of a dominant lover-silent mistress binary is precisely that this argument “typically presupposes the stability of gender categories. Writing poetry, according to this model, is gendered masculine, and it is associated with many forms of power and agency, not least the power to silence the female voice.”⁶ I will be arguing, however, that Petrarchanism is a discourse that does engender its speaking voice as masculine, and does not easily allow a female subject as speaking poet-lover. One of Dubrow’s objections to this enterprise is that

[M]any [feminist] studies of the sonnet... emphasize the unassailable hegemony of patriarchy. The image... of the omnipotent male poet satisfies many agendas of feminism, at once demonstrating the force of patriarchy in early modern England and exemplifying patterns of domination that indubitably occur in other cultures as well, not least our own.⁷

While I cannot stress emphatically enough that I do not view Wroth, her persona in her sonnets, Pamphilia, or women writing in the Renaissance in general as uncomplicatedly victims of a patriarchal system, I do believe that English Petrarchanism does exemplify many strategies and concerns of patriarchalist discourse. The roots of the sonnet, in its formal and poetic history,⁸ as well as the workings of its power relations as they came to be expressed in English Petrarchanism, produce implications that are directly related to gender. When seen in

⁵ In *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987).

⁶ *Echoes of Desire: English Petrarchism and its Counterdiscourses* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 11.

⁷ *Echoes of Desire*, 24.

⁸ As detailed, for example, by Michael Spiller in *The Development of the Sonnet: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1992); Gary Waller in *English Poetry of the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Longman, 1986); Joan Kelly-Gadol in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History* edited by Renate Bridenthal *et al.* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987); the essays in *Seeking the Woman in Late Medieval and Renaissance Writings*, edited by Sheila Fisher and Janet Halley (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989); and Joel Fineman’s discussion of the philosophy and imagery informing

the light of Wroth's sonnets, many of the Petrarchan sonnet's historically formulated oppressive manoeuvres are revealed. But in speaking, Wroth is constructing a female persona, which impacts on the form in which she is writing in a way that does not simply reflect English Petrarchanism's gender constructions, but changes them as well. Therefore, the sonnet does provide a model for "demonstrating the force of patriarchy," but this does not simultaneously assure patriarchy's "unassailable hegemony." Dubrow rightly warns against viewing Petrarchanism as a monolithically masculinist discourse. Petrarchanism is as much made up of what she calls counterdiscourses, that is, threads of the tradition that react against its assumptions and particular modes of expression. "The counterdiscourses of Petrarchanism... can mime the problematics of female subjectivity as well as male, and Wroth is attracted to the sonnet... as a potential model for her own subjectivity."⁹ Indeed, that Petrarchanism as a form can accommodate female subjectivity, voice, desires is clear: Wroth has written a counterdiscursive Petrarchan sequence, which is to say, a Petrarchan sequence, since the primary discourse and its counterdiscourses weave the complex, many-threaded fabric that is Petrarchanism. But Petrarchanism had been used in specifically gendered ways in England, to express a particular kind of love and a particular kind of speaking subject. Therefore when Wroth picks up the loom as the first Englishwoman to create public, Petrarchan love poetry, her persona has to encounter certain difficulties. These difficulties are caused as much by Wroth's, and Pamphilia's, social contexts as by the Petrarchanism that was created out of these specific contexts. Thus the Petrarchanism Wroth inherits appears monolithic in certain ways. However, she can, and does, enter into the discourse and use it to her own purposes. As much as Pamphilia encounters certain problems caused by the difference of her gender in a discourse traditionally gendered as accommodating a male speaking subject, she proves that the form itself does allow for many counterdiscursive strands of poetic creation of meaning.

Dubrow's complication of the empowered/ male/ speaker - disempowered/ female/ beloved binary is based on what she defines as the "problematics of gender

Renaissance love poetry in *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye: The Invention of Poetic Subjectivity in the Sonnets* (California: University of California Press, 1986).

⁹ *Echoes of Desire*, 161.

categories” during the Renaissance.¹⁰ I hope to provide a sense of the complexities of these terms in my discussion of gender creation during the early modern period in chapter two. I will assert that writing is not monolithically, and was not practically, an activity “gendered masculine” in the early modern period, at least not entirely. Women did write, and did write poetry, Wroth being a case in point. Rather, I will argue that writing Petrarchan poetry, with its public and erotic concerns, entails confronting specific gender dynamics.

Petrarchan poetry can accommodate many aspects of personal and political power. Dubrow accounts for the tradition’s popularity in Renaissance England by the fact that Petrarchanism is concerned with expressing a response to power. This is because Petrarchanism’s explorations of issues of power parallel many of the struggles for power endemic to the age:

The seesaw between power and powerlessness... which defines the Petrarchan voice was especially attractive to sixteenth century English poets... These patterns stem above all from the coexistence of conflicting status systems, competing values, contesting ideologies and contrasting communities within the larger culture, a coexistence that by its very nature did not always yield a clearly dominant victor.¹¹

Renaissance culture was a complex and dynamic one, as all cultures must be. However, in opposition to the notion that multiple discourses coexisted equitably, I believe that there was a powerful, dominant ideology that was gender-oppressive (again, this does not negate opposition to this ideology); that traditional English Petrarchanism does not easily allow female agency, and does not ordinarily contain any sense of a speaking female subjectivity. Instead it creates a notion of the female to serve its own purposes in ways that do create problems for Wroth’s Pamphilia as the first speaking female within the discourse of English Petrarchan love poetry. This is not to say that women could not appropriate, use, reproduce or subvert Petrarchanism, as Ann Rosalind Jones show in her discussion of the writing of Pernette du Guillet and Louise Labe.¹² Furthermore, Dubrow downplays the fact that women were actively redefining a tradition dominated by male writers when women

¹⁰ *Echoes of Desire*, 11.

¹¹ *Echoes of Desire*, 25-26.

¹² “Assimilation With a Difference: Renaissance Women Poets and Literary Influence” in *Yale French Studies* 62 (1981).

wrote within it, suggesting that women did officially have room to manoeuvre within gender theory of the time and within Petrarchan poetics. To use the fact that the period was a time of flux and redefinition in order to say that this manoeuvrability was given to women rather than that they had to create it, is to overlook the differences between the textuality of Petrarchanism (what the form could express), and the realities of the socio-historical situation. In this case, Dubrow goes on to assert that Petrarchan subjectivity slides between genders, is not specifically male (as I detail in chapter four). But this slipperiness is not possible within my formulation of Petrarchan subjectivity as dependent on gender for one of its constituting factors. And the English Petrarchanism that Wroth encountered does set up a gender binary that a speaker is forced to enter into when s/he enters into the discourse itself, as I will try to prove in chapter three.

A major problem that faces feminists trying to access the Renaissance female subject (aside from the always-debatable, ever-shifting nature of the terms of inquiry) is the impossibility of getting beyond the silence. The issue implied in Sheila Fisher and Janet Halley's chapter title, "The Lady Vanishes: The Problem of Women's Absence in Late Medieval and Renaissance Texts" is reinforced by the blurb with which they preface their work: "The difficulties in writing on the history of women have ever been rehearsed many times, and nothing in the future will ever remove them... Writers' hopes of documenting women's lives will always outrun the possibilities of achievement."¹³ We can only hope to construct our own ideologically-loaded notions from the faint echoes that might or might not reverberate through the words of women writers in the period, trapped as they are within strictly delimited discourses (and, even then, sometimes replicating patriarchal assumptions), and through the constructs of the male writers, who reveal more about themselves through the 'female' voices they create than about any realities of female experiences. Indeed, most often "the female speaker invented by a male author is the mark of female absence, because the male author is speaking not through, but across the female in order to address other men."¹⁴ Halley's essay in Seeking the Woman is just one example of where and how this speaking across a woman occurred. Called "Textual

¹³ Joan Thirsk qtd. Seeking the Woman, 1.

¹⁴ Seeking the Woman, 5.

Intercourse: Anne Donne, John Donne, and the Sexual Poetics of Textual Exchange,” it details how Donne enters his wife into circulation as a female body in his letters to his friends, and in his love poems to her that circulated amongst his coterie. The texts thus publicly circulated amongst a group of men, from whom we as readers have obtained them, bring us closer to the male coterie, and not to Anne Donne.

Furthermore, Halley illustrates that we know certain historical facts about Anne More Donne’s life, but “[w]e don’t know what these events meant to her - we know nothing of her attraction to her clandestine suitor, her understanding of his motives, her experience of her father’s anger and of her exile from the class to which she was born, her feelings about her incessant pregnancies and the embraces that caused them. We don’t even know whether she was literate.”¹⁵ So all we can really do is hear the silence, but because we listen from such a distance, we cannot hear precisely what it is saying. This is to admit, then, that we cannot ever be certain that a discourse is revealing a truly ‘female’ perspective. However, by examining the differences that occur when a woman writer writes in a genre ‘invented’ by and for a certain kind of male subjectivity, and subsequently sometimes used in specific ways that have as much to do with historical as with textual reality, we can approach a notion of female perspective and/or experience, however limited. To an extent, all reading is an act of reading *into*, so that whatever idea of early modern woman we find will contain elements of ourselves. Certainly the least we can do as contemporary speakers is not replicate the action of speaking *across*.

Elizabeth Hageman says of the writing of the time that women, through their diaries, letters and other more public works,

reveal what it feels like to be part of... a ‘muted’ group. They were sometimes demoralized, sometimes angry at their culture’s labelling them ‘weaker vessels.’ Knowing that they ‘should’ be chaste, silent, and obedient, they used some of their learning to translate into English texts their husbands, fathers, and brothers thought important. They sometimes reinforced, but sometimes modified the ideology of their day... Their writing sometimes reflects, sometimes builds on, their literary and cultural milieu.¹⁶

¹⁵ *Seeking the Woman*, 190 and 187 respectively.

¹⁶ “*Did Shakespeare have any sisters?*” in *New Ways of Looking at Old Texts: Papers of the Renaissance English Text Society, 1985-1991*, ed. W. Speed Hill (New York: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Societies in conjunction with Renaissance English Text Society, 1993), 106.

So to understand early modern cultural reality as extremely gender-oppressive, is not to understand early modern female subjectivities as always victimised into silence. Nevertheless, the fact that female subjectivities exist textually mainly as silenced, as “absence, both in its literal and its literary-theoretical meanings,”¹⁷ as written-over, effaced, drained, does leave us with the danger of characterising “real” early modern female identity as always only silence, as victimhood. The challenge facing Renaissance feminist scholarship is how to get beyond this. Dubrow wishes to “complicate the resonances of silence,” saying silence in itself represents a form of power.¹⁸ But all the examples she gives of powerful silence - Kolve’s Christ, Iago, Melville’s Babo, “Egyptian discussions of rhetoric” that stress the “efficacy” of silence - are all examples of male silence within traditionally male-dominated discourses, a silence of the gender that has access to language and can choose not to utilise it. The silence of the theoretically, generally publicly, and traditionally voiceless, is another matter. The Petrarchan mistress’s silence, when she is hardly ever allowed to speak in the first place, is a different kind of silence altogether to Iago’s refusal to explain himself. Similarly, Dubrow complicates the links between speech and power and speech and agency,¹⁹ saying that “male subjectivity in [Petrarchan] sequences is often rooted as much in the difficulty of speaking or writing as in the act of doing so, while to describe the female voice as silenced is to impose a teleological model on a process of incessant struggle.”²⁰ The issue of Petrarchanism’s traditional difficulty with speech is taken up in chapters three and four, and is compared to Pamphilia’s concerns with speaking, and with speaking publicly. Dubrow’s warning against essentialism in criticism and against simplifying complex operations and relations of power is an important one, but to deny that gendered subjectivities begin with different starting points with regard to their relationship with language in the first place is to overlook a crucial point.

By virtue of the fact that she picked up a pen to write, not a domestic or religious text, but a courtly, Petrarchan one, meant Wroth was breaking cultural rules. That her persona, Pamphilia, reflects much of the violence done to female subjectivity

¹⁷ *Seeking the Woman*, 2.

¹⁸ *Echoes of Desire*, 42.

¹⁹ *Echoes of Desire*, 39-46.

²⁰ *Echoes of Desire*, 46.

(poetic and otherwise) in her own self-constitution, in her language, her desire and her love, cannot efface the fact that she is at least transgressing patriarchal definitions in some way. Within her broken discourse of Petrarchanism, within the gaps it makes in her and she makes in herself in trying to enter it, there are strategies for reclaiming aspects of language and of female selfhood, but from the speaking female self instead of from the beloved. This is an example of a vital strategic difference: that she does not replicate Petrarchanism's draining moves on her beloved's, Amphilanthus's, selfhood is the result of her gender within this gendered discourse. Indeed, she can hardly impose on him a notion of his own selfhood, let alone create a selfhood off Amphilanthus, who exists as little more than the name she gives him in the sequence's title. He is a shadow beloved, because he does not exist as a created subject in the poetry. He is not even linguistically present within the poems themselves, since his name appears only in the title. Amphilanthus exists as a character in the sequence by implication alone. This is different to the creation of a female beloved who is also absent as a real presence, as opposed to a constructed presence, precisely because while Astrophil's Stella might represent his ideal woman and thus a textual construct, she is at least linguistically present in Sidney's sonnet sequence. She is also present as a character, who is spoken directly to and about. Amphilanthus is seldom directly addressed, and when he is spoken about it is often in significantly deferred ways, as I explain in chapter six. Pamphilia is far more concerned with her own internal self, and selfhood's relationship with the external world, again in a way that does not empty his shadow-self in the poetry. ("Traditional" Petrarchan discourse, is, of course, also concerned with self-formulation, but off the reflection of the mirror of the beloved, in a way that translates as appropriation; using the Other it creates only to constitute Self, as I explain in chapters three and four). Pamphilia changes this aspect of the tradition, finding other ways to speak her desire and to constitute a sense of her self, ways that do not break down the beloved or flatten him into a reflecting mirror. This is one of Wroth's revisions within English Petrarchan discourse.

Wroth changes the fundamental dynamic of Petrarchan self-constitution at the same time as she reveals it, because Pamphilia as a female speaker cannot appropriate its masculinist moves against 'female subjectivity.' In speaking, she reveals the ways in which she is silenced, in constituting herself as poetic subject she reveals the specifically gendered way in which she is fragmented, in expressing her desire she

finds there is no female desire allowed. Her non-gestures, then, her silences and absences, within the active, voiced gesture that is her writing, speak the problems facing a female poetic subject within a discourse traditionally formulated for a male subject.

Wroth's life illustrates similar dynamics. She may ultimately have been forced back into the 'correct' position for a woman when she was made to withdraw her book from public circulation, but by breaking out of it in the first place she reveals the act of silencing performed upon her. Thus I am not constituting either author or persona as disempowered victims, even if only because it is as disempowered victims that they find, and often speak, themselves. By revealing through their new strategies, through the ways they either cannot or will not replicate certain aspects of Petrarchanism's discourse, they display their defiance. Similarly, I am not making a claim for an objective female subjectivity that exists, but is written-over, and thus reclaimable if we can just find the correct eraser. 'Modern' subjectivity, which begins according to Joel Fineman, after Shakespeare first expressed it as such in his sonnets (in Shakespeare's Perjured Eye), is fragmented through and by the language it uses to describe, define and create itself. The point of my argument, then, is not for the retrieval or creation of female subjectivity or -ties. Rather, the claim is that Petrarchanism is not an ungendered form.

The assertion that gender must always play a role in who speaks, and in what they can say within the discourse of the Petrarchan convention, must begin with the notion that Petrarchan subjectivity is always gendered. However, the terms that are necessarily invoked in such a discussion - notions of gender and difference - are not themselves unproblematic. "[G]ender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and... gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities."²¹ Gender can only be discussed in terms of the language available within a specific culture to create and describe gender configurations. Thus, any definition of gender is historically and culturally limited, and therefore historically and culturally based.

²¹ Gender Trouble, 3.

Another point of debate is the importance gender plays in identity formation. Dubrow says that gender is not “the overriding determinant of subjectivity.”²² I would suggest, that within English Petrarchanism at least, gender is a primary factor in determining the strategies available to the speaking subject. Dubrow’s illustration of her point, that when Wroth writes sonnets “her status as a Sidney may well be as important as her status as a woman”²³ is undeniably true, as is explicated in chapter two. But it is her status as a woman that informs the ways in which she interprets her status as a Sidney. There are fundamental differences in the ways she interprets Petrarchanism to the way Sidney does, that are based on the gender differences of both poets and personas, allowing them different kinds of access to Petrarchan language. This comparison is more fully explored in chapter three. Dubrow points out that gender is one element in a matrix of identity formation, or that “the relationship among the components of subjectivity is a dynamic one, for identification should be seen more as a process than an act.”²⁴ Identity formation as a process does not deny gender as a part of that process. We must take ‘gender,’ however that is formulated - as a site of difference (following Simone Beauvoir), as a site of absence (following Luce Irigaray), as a problematic and shifting point of coalition (following Butler) - into account when discussing identity, whether of poetic subjectivities or of the subjectivities of readers of poetry, in their responses to the subject positions created by their reading.

The answers to the questions, what is gender? and how is this tied up with identity (subjectivity)? cannot be easily answered, and certainly not within the course of a thesis on Wroth’s poetry. Nevertheless, these large theoretical questions need to be defined in some way for the course of the assertions I will be making. The notion of subjectivity, too, is a complex one, especially with regards to feminist assertions about the female subject. “There is a great deal of material that not only questions the viability of ‘the subject’ as the ultimate candidate for representation..., but there is very little agreement after all on what it is that constitutes, or ought to constitute, the category of women.”²⁵ This is in keeping with Fineman’s constitution of a ‘modern’

²² *Echoes of Desire*, 144.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Gender Trouble*, 1.

subject as always fragmented, since the notion of a subject called 'women' cannot be assumed to designate any one thing, as the debate within feminist theory in recent years, about which subject groups feminist should claim to speak for, has illustrated. But still, Fineman's notion of the subject as somehow tied into a heterosexual, misogynist identity must be seen as too narrow. And certain critics of Renaissance poetry, such as Gary Waller, Michael Spiller and Germaine Greer, replicate these assumptions in the ways they discuss the writing and reception of the sonnet, as will be seen.

The fact that feminists are engaged in similar political struggles in contemporary language as in the early modern period can be seen in the ways that these critics are replicating Petrarchanism's assumptions, elisions, drainages. The consequences of the importance of gender in the subjectivity matrix are still overlooked by these critics in their general assessments of the sonnet tradition, as well as in the assumptions they make about how Petrarchan poetry can be interpreted by their readers. It is at this point, in the terms of this discussion, that Renaissance ideology intersects with certain practices of making meaning in current criticism. Just as one strand of Petrarchanism creates a notion of the female subject in order to empty it, through the way the lover reflects his own subjectivity off his beloved, so a similar process, one of over-writing notions of "female" experiences, however diverse these might be, is being replicated by these critics of the sonnet-tradition. Although Fineman and Waller, especially, stress the socio-historical context of the poems' modes of production, Renaissance concerns with language, its relationship to subjectivity and its implicit and explicit elaborations of the workings of power, they do not carry through the obvious implications into their own critical activity: that critical language can also affect its readers' subjectivities, and in ways that assume certain power relations. By universalising the subject-matter of, and the subject positions created by, their own critical discourses these critics seamlessly incorporate and replicate this writing-over of the female subject - whatever that might be. The assumptions still made by these critics today, that an undifferentiated discourse of subjectivity is good enough, is an assumption which traps readers as much as Petrarchanism traps Pamphilia. In other words, speaking *across* is an activity of which many modern scholars of the Renaissance sonnet are still guilty. As Carol Thomas Neely complained almost ten years ago:

In spite of all that the new theoretical discourses seem to have in common with feminist criticism, in spite of their appropriation of some of its claims, their effect - not necessarily a deliberate... one - has been to oppress women, repress sexuality, and subordinate gender issues. All of the topoi of the new approaches: the historicity and intertextuality of texts; the constriction of history to power, politics, and ideology; the denial of unity, autonomy, and identity in authors, subjects, texts; the displacement from women to woman to sexual difference to textuality; the view of man/ woman as just one more in an outmoded, interchangeable parade of binary oppositions, have the effect of putting woman in her customary place... - the same old master plot. In it, women continue to be marginalized, erased, displaced, allegorized... The new approaches are not new enough.²⁶

Much work has been done on the development of the subject within Petrarchanism, but hardly ever with the awareness that any subjectivity created within the convention must have gendered implications. Spiller traces the increasing emphasis on internal subjectivity in the sonnet form from its inception, throughout the history of the Petrarchan genre. He talks of "the long European progress towards a fictional space in which the internal /I/ can be dramatised... as a voice that can speak for every reader about every reader."²⁷ This idea of an un-gender-differentiated Petrarchan /I/, and the uncontested relationship of this /I/ to its reader in such a totalising, universalising manner, indicates precisely the problematic nature of critical assumptions about the subject created in and by Petrarchan language. That the Petrarchan subject is gendered in specific ways, and in relation to its object, the beloved, will be fully explored in chapter three.

Fineman characterises the poetic self of the Renaissance sonnet before Shakespeare as presenting itself as "a *full* self, present to itself, or potentially so, by virtue of the complementary relationship it discovers or hopes to discover, between objective and subjective pointing."²⁸ Thus, in what Fineman says is typical of Renaissance poetry, "what the poet sees outside himself will regularly be... an image of himself, or... the poet's praise of 'thee' will regularly turn out to be a praise of 'me.'"²⁹ Granted, Wroth wrote much later, after the high vogue of the Petrarchan sonnet was over - her work was published in 1621, and Shakespeare's sonnets,

²⁶ "Constructing the Subject: Feminist Practice and the New Renaissance Discourses" in English Literary Renaissance 18.1 (1988), 7.

²⁷ The Development of the Sonnet, 36-7.

²⁸ Shakespeare's Perjured Eye, 9.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

probably written in the last ten years of the sixteenth century and published in 1609, were themselves already at the tail-end of the tradition, a fact Fineman stresses in his book. Nevertheless, Wroth did choose this old-fashioned form, and wrote intensely self-reflective poetry. But unlike what Fineman has characterised as being typical of Petrarchan poetic subjectivity, Wroth's referents are different to the standard beloved of the earlier Renaissance love poetry; she writes not of an ideal "thee" constructed in order to reflect the praise back on herself, but of a series of abstracted metaphysical companions, a capricious and ever-changing Love, and an absent heart.

The "I" of a Petrarchan sequence "is never stable."³⁰ Indeed, probably following Fineman, Waller describes Shakespeare's sonnets as expressing a deconstructed subject, existing as a subject "only because it continually experiences itself as changing," aware of a lack which causes desire, articulating this lack "by inserting itself in language, which serves only as a further decentering."³¹ If we accept that this notion of the subject is in fact a notion of the male subject, Waller's comments on the Petrarchan self become more complex. Petrarchan poetry is always fundamentally about loss, he says, and thus always expresses a desire to fill absence. The notions of loss and absence are certainly crucial to an understanding of Wroth's poetry. But, firstly, the absence Pamphilia finds is more often in her conception of her self within her relationship to her beloved, and thus cannot ever be filled by his (non)presence in her poetry, partly precisely because she does not use her notion of the beloved in the way detailed by Waller. And, secondly, the terms of expression and the assumptions made by Waller in this regard bear investigating. "The drive to possess and so to annihilate is a desire derived from the old Platonic ideal of original oneness, which only Shakespeare and Donne... seem to have seen as a clear and fearful perversion."³² Oneness is perversion, presumably, because of the annihilating implications for the speaking self, and because of the recognition that speech, particularly Petrarchan speech, is born out of the separation, and any move to end that separation ends speech. However, that it is seen as a perversion leads to the question: where does this leave Wroth, and Wroth's Pamphilia? The question of whether Pamphilia expresses, explicitly or implicitly, this drive to possess and so annihilate is a

³⁰ *English Poetry of the Sixteenth Century*, 227.

³¹ *English Poetry of the Sixteenth Century*, 228.

³² *English Poetry of the Sixteenth Century*, 234.

debatable one; certainly I think that her inward-turning movements can mitigate any sense of an aggressive, “perverse” desire for possession and annihilation of her all-but absent beloved. Can this be because, in any formulation of oneness split into difference, it is the woman who must occupy the space of the other, or be, as Fineman suggests, the difference itself? So in speaking of the desires of a Petrarchan poet without speaking of gender, a masculinist notion of identity is posited on not only poetic subjectivity, but subjectivity as a whole. If, as *Other or Absence*, Wroth’s Pamphilia cannot speak for and about sameness, unity, desire as an expression of the need to return to a complete (masculine) subjectivity, what does she say, how, and why? And what Waller does not say about his audience is as telling as the way in which he interprets Shakespeare’s sonnets’ subject and their creation of subject positions in their readers. The sonnets, Waller says, “insist that, at their most authentic, *our* affirmations are made, often, through pain - pain faced and not vanquished but accepted as the dark visceral elements in which *we all* must live and struggle.”³³ Thus Waller himself allows his language to colonise his readers’ subjectivities, assuming as a basic starting point a notion of experience that is common to all his addressees - ignoring not only gender, but class, race, culture, nationhood and sexuality as well.

Contrary to the one branch of criticism about subjectivity in the sonnet, mentioned above, Fineman says:

the literary history of the Renaissance sonnet does not really demonstrate an increasingly subjective poetics, not if this is understood to mean a poetry that is increasingly expressive of a personal and individuated poetic self... as the sonnet develops - as Petrarch, say, turns to Petrarchanism - poetic subjectivity becomes increasingly artificial.³⁴

Thus by the time Wroth uses Petrarchanism its highly artificial form is overtly constructing its own, specific kind of, subjectivity. When Petrarch turned to Petrarchanism and both became popular in Elizabethan courtly and satellite-courtly circles, the convention became a language, one in which recognisable codes could be invoked with just a gesture. And the meanings referred to also changed as the tradition became formalised. Petrarch’s poetry expressed its ideas of transcendence by referring to the symbolic ideal itself - the poet’s image of Laura. The poetry of

³³ *Ibid.*, my emphasis.

³⁴ *Shakespeare’s Perjured Eye*, 9.

Petrarchanism, on the other hand, by definition must use the idea of Petrarch's Laura, the prototype, as a referent of the kind of love-object it wants to express, thus turning all its mistresses into a version of Laura. The important question here is, according to this formulation, is Wroth's poetry a poetry of praise? Can it fit into Fineman's definition of epideictic poetry (the Renaissance sonnet, he says, thematises itself as something "epi-deictic", whereby "the poetry of praise becomes a praise of poetry itself"³⁵). And if not, what are the implications, not only for Wroth's Petrarchan poetry of unrequited love, but also for Fineman's theory of the poetic subjectivity within the Petrarchan sonnet of unrequited love? (Especially since he says what happens in Shakespeare's sonnets - the creation of a 'new' kind of subjectivity - influences the poetic subjectivities of all who write thereafter. But Wroth, a woman writer of sonnets after Shakespeare, does not, indeed perhaps cannot, assume the misogynist element of poetic subjectivity Fineman illustrates is integral to Shakespeare's "new" poetic subject).

Seeing Shakespeare's sonnets not as a break with an old tradition but a culmination of aspects of that tradition, Waller asserts that Shakespeare's sonnets are "part of the - perhaps indeed *the* - culmination of the Petrarchan obsession with the vulnerability of the 'I' in the discourse of love."³⁶ Not only does this leave Wroth entirely out of the tradition because she wrote thereafter and because her extremely vulnerable poetic 'I' is deeply involved with, and vulnerable in some ways precisely because of, the Petrarchan tradition, it speaks only of the 'I' as male, because the Petrarchan lover traditionally chooses his obsessions from and about a mythical, constructed sense of femininity. Thus the vulnerability of an 'I' within a "discourse of love" is not a general position shared by all subjects who enter into the discourse. Rather, for male poetic subjects in Petrarchanism, the vulnerability is desirable as a means of expressing, ultimately, aspects of the Self that result from the poet's self-constituting love. And this effect of being a lover is different in Wroth's Petrarchan poetry, since it is not Pamphilia's project to reflect Sameness off her beloved. Also, the vulnerability of a male speaker within Petrarchanism is often a political vulnerability, assumed publicly as a means of expressing a desire that is not based

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ English Poetry of the Sixteenth Century, 235.

actually on sexual love but rather on political advancement.³⁷ A female speaker of the early modern period cannot as uncomplicatedly assume the right to be speaking publicly, and certainly cannot unproblematically express the desire for political power. This is not to say that Wroth may not have had a similar political, public agenda when she entered into a political, public genre, but that she must (and does) express such frustration in far more internal ways, that have specific implications for her female persona.³⁸ Furthermore, Waller repeatedly stresses that this vulnerability is existential in nature.³⁹ But Petrarchan male subjectivity rests on the security of a gendered self - on the assumption of male as universal personhood - drawing power, self-referentiality and self-determination from the female icons it saps of any possibility of selfhood. The existentialism it expresses, then, is artificially created by drawing its existence from female existenceless, as its expression is based on female silence.

Fineman says that the Renaissance sonnet moves from being what he terms "reflexively reflective"⁴⁰ to the new topology expressed in Shakespeare's Dark Lady sonnets, wherein there appears for the first time in the tradition the desire for "that which is not admired," thus resulting in "erotic heterosexual desire and linguistic heterogeneity at the cost of homogeneous visibility."⁴¹ Fineman says that it is only when the poet "*literally* puts his suspicion of true vision" - which characterised poetic language before Shakespeare - "into words that lust can be a powerful theme in the Renaissance sonnet... Shakespeare's sonnets introduce, make possible for the first time, an outspoken poetics of erotic desire - Shakespeare invents the poetics of heterosexuality."⁴² What Fineman does not overtly say is that it is the invention of a *certain kind of male* heterosexuality, one that is predicated, by Fineman's formulation, on a desire for "that which is not admired." Does this mean, as Fineman would seem to be suggesting, that *all* heterosexual subjectivity is fundamentally misogynist? Does this mean that heterosexual subjectivity can only operate along a binary of self - other, where self is always male, and other is always the disgustingly female? Why does

³⁷ See Arthur Marotti, " 'Love is not love': Elizabethan sonnet sequences and the social order" in *English Literary History* 49 (1982).

³⁸ See Ann Rosalind Jones, "Designing Women: The Self as Spectacle in Mary Wroth and Veronica Franco" in *Reading Mary Wroth: Representing Alternatives in Early Modern England*, ed. Naomi Miller and Gary Waller (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991).

³⁹ Cf. *English Poetry of the Sixteenth Century*, 215-255.

⁴⁰ *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye*, 13ff.

⁴¹ *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye*, 18.

⁴² *Ibid.*

Fineman meticulously detail the development of the Renaissance sonnet without once mentioning the fact that women did write sonnets, at least in Italy and France if they did not in England initially, as Petrarch turned to Petrarchanism? Why does he not characterise his definition of poetic subjectivity pre- and post- Shakespeare as explicitly male? Is Wroth's poetry not included in his account of a specific kind of male literary history (the history of praise poetry), because of the different ways in which she uses the conventions of Petrarchanism and the ways they use her, which are in turn based on the fact that she writes as a woman, of a woman lover to a male beloved, within a form that is implicitly gendered as and for masculine subjectivity? Or has he overlooked the existence of, if not female poetic subjectivity, since that is an undefinable term, any alternatives to a homogeneous male subjectivity? Indeed, he says that "poetry develops towards Shakespeare"⁴³ - a teleological view that would place Wroth further along the developmental line, or one that ignores her completely because she is not part of the received, canonized, poetic tradition, since if all poetic subjectivity after Shakespeare must reflect his notion of the misogynist, split, linguistic subject, Wroth's Pamphilia does not express this kind of subjectivity.

Ironically, in his "Conclusion" to English Poetry of the Sixteenth Century, subtitled "Reopening the Canon?," Waller characterises Wroth's poetry as either outside the canon of true, major Petrarchan poetry, or as valuable only and precisely because of her gender:

We can... explain away [Wroth's] poetry empirically as a minor, belated, variant of Petrarchan love poetry, pointing out that Mary Wroth writes in the shadow of both her uncle's *Astrophil and Stella* and her father's poems. But we might ask the further questions: what difference does the author's *gender* make to her sequence?... Wroth is writing within a genre entirely structured by male categories - by the distancing of the erotic by logic, by the fixing of the female as a body which is the subject of power, requiring her passivity as the object of anguish or manipulation. Do we see any signs at all of what is increasingly seen today as the psychic distortion and alienation that occur when a woman writer represses her gender-specific desires to write?⁴⁴

The question of desire is an important one, not only in the implications of a "gender-specific desire to write," but in the ways in which Wroth's Pamphilia expresses her female desiring self within a discourse that had, until Wroth entered it, been developed

⁴³ Shakespeare's Perjured Eye, 194.

⁴⁴ English Poetry of the Sixteenth Century, 267.

in England as a discourse of (a certain kind of) male desire, and furthermore, where reciprocal female desire had been an impossibility, as Waller points out above.

This notion of a desiring subject is fundamental to Fineman's thesis on poetic subjectivity, and the assumptions he makes about undifferentiated heterosexual desire are enormous. In a discussion of The Rape of Lucrece, Fineman equates the energy of heterosexual desire to the action of rape.⁴⁵ Within this formulation, it is almost impossible for Pamphilia to express a desiring self, when her self is so passive and inward-turning, not to say female. Nevertheless, she does express desire, although her struggles to allow herself to do so and the tactics to which she resorts in order to accommodate, and ultimately, purge herself of, her desire are indicative of the difficulties an early modern female subject experienced upon entering Petrarchan discourse. This is explored in chapter four.

Fineman draws his notion of heterosexual desire from Shakespeare's Dark Lady sonnets. He details the ways in which the Dark Lady sonnets add new "themes and motifs" to the Renaissance sonnet, illustrating the way "a homosexual erotics of ideal admiration is replaced by a heterosexual, and therefore misogynous, desire for that which is not admired."⁴⁶ If heterosexual desire is by definition misogynist, then the theory outlined by Beauvoir In The Second Sex is accurate - male subjectivity is human subjectivity, and female identity is always Other, is always the only gendered form of identity, and furthermore, as Monique Wittig says, "'woman' has meaning only in heterosexual systems of thought... Lesbians are not women."⁴⁷

If the Renaissance sonnet is forever changed after Shakespeare as Fineman asserts, because of the expression for the first time of a linguistic, misogynist-heterosexual subjectivity, then why does Wroth not duplicate it? Because she is a woman writing a woman persona? Or does Fineman's notion of subjectivity as either (male) homosexual or misogynist-heterosexual account for the complicated ways in which Pamphilia presents herself as a Petrarchan speaking subject? That poetic subjectivity in Petrarchanism is a construct into which a speaking woman cannot easily enter, at least not without having an effect on her own subject position and on the discourse itself, is one conclusion we may draw from Fineman's formulation of the

⁴⁵ Shakespeare's Perjured Eye, 41ff.

⁴⁶ Shakespeare's Perjured Eye, 188.

⁴⁷ Qtd. Sex and Sexuality: A Thematic Dictionary of Quotations (London: Cassel, 1993), 109.

desiring subject; that he is universalising one particular kind of subjectivity and not allowing space for non-heterosexual, non-misogynist and non-male subjectivity is another.

Another difference Fineman sees in love poetry before Shakespeare's heterosexual poetry of a linguistic self, is the fact that Renaissance poetry before Shakespeare is a specular poetry, a poetry of and about the visual: the

idealizing language figures itself as specifically specular language because such a visual logos, in its visibility and its visuality, simulates the ideal such a language speaks about... [T]he recursive circularity thus expressed is important because it establishes the truth of an idealizing speech. The knowledge... of the ideal *is* the ideal. [This produces]... a discourse whose referential truth is tautologically... confirmed because such a language *is* the things of which it speaks.⁴⁸

Fineman says that this visual poetry, a poetry of sight, is exhausted by the time Shakespeare comes to write of it in his sonnets to the young man. However, Wroth's poetry, a poetry that is in many ways non-referential, is obsessed with the visual. The act of looking, of being looked upon, the power that lies in eyes and specifically in Amphilanthus's eyes being like the sun, as well as the self-enclosed visuals seen by her eyes alone, are all important tropes in Wroth's sonnet sequence. Also, her eyes' ability to look away - to not themselves be seen by other eyes, is at times the most empowering activity in which Wroth's Pamphilia can engage. This is the subject of chapter five. Once again, then, Fineman's delineations of when and where definitive changes occurred in the development of poetic subjectivity fail to account for the differences caused by Wroth's writing of a female poetic subject.

Precisely because she cannot duplicate an epideictic poetry of praise whose reflexive reflection Fineman insists upon, because as a woman she cannot praise herself (especially in a culture implicitly suspicious of female speech, linking it to female licentiousness - which would clash unallowably within Petrarchan discourse with the identity allotted to female presence as an ideal and therefore sexually 'pure' beloved, and specifically with Pamphilia's insistence on her chastity and constancy) she must move inwards and talk of herself to only herself. Pamphilia cannot reflexively reflect her ideal image of herself off her ideal beloved because he is not expressed in these kinds of specular terms - he is not present as object in the poetry - and because

⁴⁸ Shakespeare's Perjured Eye, 13.

he is not ideal, as his very name suggests: he cannot be the beatific stellar light, the poet's means of salvation, as are Dante's Beatrice, or Astrophil's Stella. Rather he is always already a "lover of two," a fragmented ideal object, and a betrayer. He clearly cannot occupy the role of reflector, which, significantly, began with the Ideal Lady of the *Stilnovisti* poets: the beloved became, in this generation of writers immediately preceding Petrarch, closer to the ideal of physical and spiritual perfection she is in Petrarchanism.⁴⁹ Indeed, in the comments of Mario Marti we can see the beginnings of the Petrarchan self-reflexiveness: "The Lady of the *stilnovisti*... does not make up the Other in a dialogue of love: she is the figure into which flows and is reflected the interior life of the poet - almost the symbol of self-contemplation."⁵⁰ Thus the ideal nature of the beloved is based upon her femaleness, upon her ability to be passively and seamlessly a reflection. It is precisely such a notion of woman as the Other half of Plato's unified, sexless, original creature that can allow for the beloved to represent the poet's self. Amphilanthus is a man, and thus cannot be assumed to be a passive counterpart to a (heterosexual) subjective whole that itself is characterised as male. Furthermore, Wroth's love poetry cannot be the poetry of the same, cannot begin with the typical Petrarchan suppression of difference - its insistence on the beloved being the ideal reflection of the lover - because this insistence, based as it is on woman as Other half, fundamentally silences women and she is a writing, speaking woman.

I have briefly mentioned some of the ways in which certain critical works on the sonnet broadly assume an ungendered poetic subjectivity, and extend this notion of a universal (male) subject to their own readers. I want to clarify this point more fully by giving a few examples of the kind of language-use that disturbs me, and to examine how this ties in with certain critical assumptions about Petrarchanism as an ungendered form.

Sonnet criticism that is not doing so needs to begin making transparent its own ideological assumptions. My point about a certain representation of subjectivity in the sonnet in critical writing is that, by not recognizing different subjective possibilities based on gender - if only *as* difference, initially or generally - we replicate the

⁴⁹ Cf. *The Development of the Sonnet*, 30ff.

⁵⁰ Qtd. *The Development of the Sonnet*, 29.

immobilization of gender awareness in the sonnet-form, its content, and in the subject of the sonnet.

Speaking of Shakespeare's sonnets, Waller says: "In Sonnet 124, we are challenged to become fools - ... holy fools before the creative challenge of our finitude - and we 'die,' are fulfilled sexually, existentially, only if we submit ourselves, 'hugely politic,' to the inevitable compromises, violence and disruption which is life... we are deceivers yet true."⁵¹ "Deceivers yet true" is an apt epithet for the critics who assimilate and transmit the implications of Petrarchanism as silently as the original poets did. Despite the fact that Waller himself is a critic deeply involved in working on women in the early modern period, and in the processes of female silences and silencing of the time, he speaks here in a kind of generalised, universalised language of subjectivity: the sexual and existential fulfillment "we" enjoy from Shakespeare's sonnets, and the "violence" that is part of "our" lives, is not equitable across gender lines, even, or especially, if we even partially accept Fineman's formulation of modern poetic subjectivity as inherently misogynistic. The "compromises" faced by Waller's Shakespeare's readers do not include, cannot speak, the violences worked against female subjectivities and female subjects by the form itself, Petrarchanism, or by the untrue assumption that (sexual- or life-) experiences are similar for all genders (or classes, or races, or cultures).

The assertion that Petrarchanism is not an ungendered form, whose language is open to all who wish to use it, is not an uncontested one. Germaine Greer, in a book on women writers in the medieval and early modern periods, writes:

Nowhere in the Petrarchan tradition that ruled European poetry for more than three hundred years can we find anything that positively excludes the possibility that the poet is a woman or that the muse-beloved she invokes is male; the sex of the beloved is irrelevant... as the love object, regardless of its biological sex, is rendered passive by the aggressive and conquistadorial act of making a poem, it is feminized... Literature students often object that the Petrarchan sonnet is anti-feminist, that the... sum of the poetry [is] the exaltation and display of the poet's own intellect. This would have been equally true if Petrarch had been a woman or if Laura had been a man.⁵²

⁵¹ English Poetry of the Sixteenth Century, 235.

⁵² Slip-Shod Sibyls: Recognition, Rejection and the Woman Poet (London: Penguin, 1995), 6-7.

Greer has been characterised by Susan Faludi as being part of “the backlash brains trust,”⁵³ thus accounting for why someone who, at her career’s inception, was so insistent on gender as a fundamental factor in experience, would marginalise it - because she is part of the wider cultural backlash against feminism that assumes the need for a ‘woman’s’ movement is over. It is precisely the sense that gender issues are no longer important enough to warrant particular attention that Neely objects to in the “new” Renaissance criticism. Here Greer states not only that gender is irrelevant to Petrarchanism, thus simplifying and compressing large amounts of scholarship with the statement that feminist objections to Petrarchanism arise from the fact that the poetry is in sum a display of “the poet’s own intellect,” but also entraps the “feminine” in the realm of the conquered. The easy reversal of the poet-beloved binary - the assumption that Laura would have done the same to Petrarch who would have been constituted in the same light had he been the beloved - reveals not only the refusal to acknowledge why the female beloved could be objectified and silenced and blazoned in ways that a man could not, ignoring the socio-historical gender realities of the time, but, once again, universalises a notion of the writing subject as male, assuming no proscribed, expressive or qualitative differences in a ‘female’ experience of the world and the word.⁵⁴

Spiller says that sixteenth-century Italy “had a group of distinguished female poets who used the Petrarchan sonnet (thereby demonstrating that its metaphors and images are not gender-specific) to proclaim their love for husbands and lovers.”⁵⁵ The fact that Spiller comments on what these metaphors and images are used for by the women - to proclaim love for husbands and lovers - after detailing the love sonnet as a means for political advancement for the men who wrote it in the same period and in the same culture, and showing how the women they addressed were used as contacts to sources of power - wives of important men, men who could grant political favour, for example - indicates a fundamental gender difference in the ways the sonnet was written, and the purposes for which it was used. If female poets were not overtly expressing political power issues but uncomplicatedly expressing love for men - and

⁵³ Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women (London: Vintage, 1992), 353-4.

⁵⁴ Indeed, women writers “do different things with literary genres than do their male counterparts because their individual experiences are different” (Elizabeth Hageman, “Preface” to English Literary Renaissance 18.1 [1988], 106).

⁵⁵ The Development of the Sonnet, 70.

that expression could itself include personal power issues, but Spiller does not mention that here - then the poetic subject created in a poem expressing nothing but love must be in some ways fundamentally different from a poetic subject seeking political advancement. The metaphors and images may be externally the same (and I would argue that there are certain elements of the language that cannot be 'the same' across speaking gender lines), but the effects and uses to which they can be put depend upon the gender of the writer. This is not to suggest that female political desire cannot be accommodated or expressed within Petrarchanism. Indeed, Jones reads Wroth's prose piece The Countess of Montgomerys Urania and the sonnet sequence Pamphilia to Amphilanthus as expressions of Wroth's attempts to reclaim political favour.⁵⁶ That Spiller's own methods of evaluation are gender-differentiated can be seen in the fact that the only female sonneteer of whose work an example appears in the chapter is Gaspara Stampa, and her poem is cited as an example of "sincere" (as opposed to political) writing. Spiller lists a group of women writers - Stampa, Victoria Gambora, Vittoria Colonna, Tullia d'Aragona "and others" - and explains all their work as being engaged only in "construct[ing] their emotional identities."⁵⁷ Of Wroth, in a footnote, Spiller says that her sonnets

are a close imitation of Sir Philip Sidney's sonnet sequence, in tone, conceits and approach... but, despite the female voice, one notes what one notes in the sonnets of Gaspara Stampa and her female poet colleagues in Italy in the previous century: unless there is a specific marker of sex inserted, the Petrarchan mode is the mode of interior desire, and is not gender-specific.⁵⁸

- as though the notion of gender were not itself so complicated as to throw into flux the notion of a generic desire. Furthermore, the specifically gendered nature of Wroth's Pamphilia's "interior desire" is explored in chapters three and four.

The furor around the publication of Wroth's Urania is indication that in her socio-historical context, the activities associated with writing and publicly circulating love poetry are gendered as belonging to the male sphere of action. How then can the Petrarchan speaking self not be gendered, and how can the critical tradition create a theory of Petrarchan subjectivity that does not reveal its own silences, assumptions, subsumings? Waller says, "However desirable it would be, the private world cannot be

⁵⁶ "Designing Women," 135-154.

⁵⁷ The Development of the Sonnet, 70-71.

⁵⁸ The Development of the Sonnet, 224.

isolated from the public; both are traversed and constituted by the same languages.”⁵⁹ This may be true, but the early modern period’s clear designation of private world as the only appropriate realm for women, at least theoretically (which is to say, women did work their ways around these boundaries in real ways), indicates that certain public language was not explicitly or unproblematically available to female writers; Wroth’s flaunting of precisely the public/private language of Petrarchanism that was only properly, proprietously, available to men, is discussed in context in chapter two, and her awareness of the ways in which the private is inescapably constituted by the public is explicated in chapter six.

Spiller and Greer explicitly state that Petrarchanism is a genderless form. Waller and Fineman talk of the development of the tradition in terms that do not allow for gendered meaning, but that imply that the male subject and subjectivity of the tradition is universal. Critics of Wroth, on the other hand, (in Reading Mary Wroth, for example) see Wroth’s use of Petrarchanism to write love poetry as triumphantly creating an emergent female subjectivity. I think, rather, that Wroth’s Petrarchan lover, Pamphilia, highlights the fact that English Petrarchanism is a gendered form which cannot automatically accommodate a female voice.

Butler details the operation of male, heterosexual desire, defined as “*trouble*” in Sartre. She says: “For that masculinist subject of desire, trouble became a scandal with the sudden intrusion, the unanticipated agency, of a female ‘object’ who inexplicably returns the glance, reverses the gaze, and contests the place and authority of the masculine position.”⁶⁰ This is precisely what happens when a woman writes Petrarchan poetry, and this is the site of Wroth’s triumph. And this is also perhaps a means to account for the (masculinist) assumptions in the critical tradition’s overlooking of ‘female subjectivity.’ But Butler says, for her, “Power seemed to be more than an exchange between subjects or a relation of constant inversion between a subject and an Other; indeed, power appeared to operate in the production of that very binary framework for thinking about gender.”⁶¹ Pamphilia, significantly, does not reverse the power dialectic in her Petrarchanism; she does not blazon her male beloved, does not attempt to constitute a sense of her own worth from her creation of

⁵⁹ English Poetry of the Sixteenth Century, 236.

⁶⁰ Gender Trouble, ix.

⁶¹ Gender Trouble, ix-x.

his, and thus does not replicate the specular nature of praise-poetry in general as outlined by Fineman (although she may use this visibility to other effect). However, to concede these points reveals a fundamental problem in the basic assertions and assumptions of this thesis. If defining difference - the difference of Wroth's tactics within Petrarchanism - as a function of her being a woman writer within a male-created tradition is the starting point of my investigations, the theoretical implications are uncomfortable, to say the least. By insisting on difference based on gender, I am clearly replicating the binary system that is the *modus operandi* of patriarchy. This project, then, is undertaken always remembering that

The masculine/ feminine binary constitutes not only the exclusive framework in which [the specificity of the notion of 'women'] can be recognized, but in every other way the 'specificity' of the feminine is... fully decontextualized and separated off analytically and politically from the constitution of class, race, ethnicity, and other axes of power relations that both constitute 'identity' and make the singular notion of identity a misnomer.⁶²

So, there is a major theoretical snag in my attempt to locate and in some ways define female subjectivities - not in terms of denying other axes of power, because I use the plural precisely to suggest space for many constituting factors, and I believe a feminist discourse does assume gender identity as a core issue - but because it reproduces, indeed, relies upon, the binary I insist Pamphilia does not replicate. And I consider this non-replication a fundamental aspect of her female poetic subjectivity. This contradiction can only be excused by conceding that the notion of difference does exist as a means of understanding the constitutions of gender, that is to say, subject, identity, and therefore does exist within poetic subjectivity, and, more importantly, that even if it exists only as an artificial means to construct gender/ power relations and relations of meaning, the subsuming of such gender difference into general theories of the poetic or reading subjects must be resisted.

Certainly, Fineman constructs the entire tradition of Renaissance poetry and of poetic subjectivity as being from and to the male: "Such a verbal poetics [the poetics of the subject after Shakespeare] will necessarily enforce a desire for what is not admired, and in doing so thereby promote a specifically misogynistic, heterogeneous, heterosexual desire for an Other which is not the ideal, homogeneous,

⁶² Gender Trouble, 4.

homosexual Same.”⁶³ Indeed, Fineman has theorised female subjectivity out of existence, without ever mentioning the possibility of its existence to begin with. “After Shakespeare,” he says, “all poetry, if it is to be called poetry, will be a poetry of para-Petrarchanism, not Petrarchanism, a poetry... of speech not vision... of misogynistic heterosexuality not idealizing homosexuality, of heterogeneous difference not homogeneous likeness.”⁶⁴ Wroth’s poetry is after Shakespeare’s, but female poets and female poetic subjectivities are not generally figured into the poetics or the critical reception of the sonnet, hence Wroth’s struggle to be taken seriously as a writer who contributes to the Petrarchan form (Spiller says, “Her competence is at times low,”⁶⁵ and Waller characterises her Petrarchanism as being of a minor and derivative nature), and Pamphilia’s struggle with the form and with the self created by and in her (specific kind of) Petrarchan poetry.

In order to answer the questions raised in the course of this introduction, I will examine, in the second chapter, Wroth’s historical context, and the issues facing women writers of the early modern period, in order to place her work in its socio-historical framework. The ‘Denny incident’ will serve as an illustration of how Wroth’s defiance of the proscriptions for women writers was criticised in gendered terms, and thus of the political issues against and within which Pamphilia’s world is set.

In chapter three I will examine the conventions, tropes, metaphors and workings of Petrarchanism, in order to arrive at a definition of the way gender operates within the genre, and to show why feminist readings of Petrarchanism might entail more than an objection to Greer’s “display of the poet’s own intellect.” Most importantly, I will examine how Wroth uses Petrarchan tropes, and what the necessary modifications entail for her lover-persona. Furthermore, I will detail how Pamphilia is often forced by the genre within which she works to affect aspects of her speaking, loving self in ways that fundamentally disempower her as a Petrarchan lover and as a woman.

⁶³ *Shakespeare’s Perjured Eye*, 288.

⁶⁴ *Shakespeare’s Perjured Eye*, 296.

⁶⁵ *The Development of the Sonnet*, 224.

In the fourth chapter I will examine Pamphilia's desire, exploring how she expresses herself as a desiring subject and how and why she is forced ultimately to put aside her own desire, and how she thus silences herself as Petrarchan speaker. Also, I will examine the ways in which her struggle to be a desiring woman do not necessarily automatically make her a silenced and passive victim, even if she ultimately chooses to renounce her Petrarchan desire.

In chapter five I will explore the way eyes are used metaphorically and symbolically, looking at the position and consequent power afforded Amphilanthus's eyes, the implications of other watching eyes for Pamphilia, and the ways in which she uses her own eyes to reclaim a private space within which to gaze upon herself, and the subsequent implications of such a tactic.

Finally, in the last chapter I will discuss the changing nature of Love in Wroth's sonnets, and the implications for the fact that Love is conceived of as an external entity. I will try to show how this exploration of love as an entity entails various strategies for re-empowerment within Pamphilia's internal world, for her loving subject. I will examine the labyrinth metaphor in her "Crowne of Sonets," as well as the Court of Love as a site of political and personal machinations in the "Crowne" as part of this project.

I hope to demonstrate that the speaking subject within Petrarchanism is always gendered, and that this gendering affects, and is affected by, the genre's various political, erotic and speaking self's definitional practices. I hope to show that, despite writing under often oppressive conditions, neither Wroth nor Pamphilia are victims of a discourse or a society that disapprove of active female desire and speech. Pamphilia's creation of an internal space in which to love, and in which to exist as a lover, is a complex activity with multiple implications for herself as a lover, and as a woman. Furthermore, I hope to offer a reading of Wroth's sonnets that will help to establish her as an important Petrarchan poet in her own right.

Chapter 2 “May I such one wed”: The Renaissance Gender Climate Debate

A womans Tongue that is as swift as thought,
Is ever bad, and she herself starke Naught:
But shee that seldome speakes and mildly then,
Is rare Pearl amongst all other Women.
Maides must be seene, not heard, or selde or never,
O may I such one wed, if I, wed ever.¹

Becoming Visible: Women in European History was first published in 1977, and contained Joan Kelly-Gadol's now famous essay, “Did Women Have a Renaissance?” In the second edition, published ten years later, the editors comment on the large amount of scholarship that has been written on the issues of women's experiences in history in the intervening years. Much has been written, and much of this new scholarship is indebted to Kelly-Gadol's influential essay. While the general consensus seems to be that although women were dealing with a more oppressive socio-cultural context than they had been previously - as the feudal system was replaced by Renaissance city states gender delineations were much more strictly defined and solidified, Renaissance teaching revived the old misogyny of the classical period² and patriarchal ideology was reinforced with the Protestant Reformation later in the period³ - they were not all meekly silent. However, the degrees and methods of resistance are still, and probably will always be, in debate. I will examine some of the writing on women in the period, in order to try and set the scene for Wroth's socio-historical context. Here too, at the level of socio-historical inquiry, the proviso must be made that we cannot speak for a unified notion of ‘women's’ experience during the early modern period. In the Renaissance's “highly controlled and class-differentiated” “sex-gender system,”⁴ women were separated not only along class but also along religious lines. However, women were certainly treated as a specific group in the

¹ An “English Writer” qtd. Oppositional Voices, 5. Ann Rosalind Jones identifies the writer as Richard Toste, and provides the closing two lines of the ‘verse’: “A Maid that hath a lewd Tongue in her head,/ Worse than if she were found with a Man in bed” (“Surprising Fame: Renaissance Gender Ideologies and Women's Lyric” in The Poetics of Gender, ed. Nancy Miller [New York: Columbia University Press, 1986], 77).

² “Did Women Have a Renaissance?,” 177ff.

³ William Monter, “Protestant Wives, Catholic Saints, and the Devil's Handmaid: Women in the Age of Reformations” in Becoming Visible, 204.

⁴ Ann Rosalind Jones, The Currency of Eros: Women's Love Lyric in Europe, 1540-1620 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 6.

literature of the time, and it is within this cultural context that we must ask the questions, albeit using simplified notions of subjectivity,

How was [a woman writer - especially a love poet, such as Wroth] to justify her self-publication to a suspicious public? How was she to make herself intelligible as a desiring subject through lyrical conventions that assigned her the position of mysterious or inaccessible other?⁵

For the purposes of this exploration of the attitudes towards, and the realities of, life for women in the early modern period in England, I take the term 'Renaissance' to encompass the period roughly 1500 - 1650. I will be concerned mainly with educated women, because my focus *is* Wroth. There is also critical investigation of the lives of lower-class women. The Jacobean witch-hunts, a radical increase in infanticide trials during which mostly young unmarried lower-class women were executed, sectarian politics,⁶ and the new ideas about marriage would almost certainly have affected the lower-class women more strongly than women like Wroth. Upper-class women could use influence, money and education to empower themselves in ways not available to women in different socio-economic brackets.

Kelly-Gadol suggests four criteria for establishing losses or gains in women's freedoms in an historical period:

1) the regulation of *female sexuality* as compared with male sexuality; 2) women's *economic* and *political* roles, that is, the kind of work they performed as compared with men, and their access to property, political power, and the education or training necessary for work, property, and power; 3) the *cultural roles* of women in shaping the outlook of their society, and access to the education and/or institutions necessary for this; 4) *ideology* about women, in particular the sex-role system displayed or advocated in the symbolic products of the society, its art, literature and philosophy.⁷

By looking at these various aspects I will attempt to provide a sense of the gender climate for Wroth. I will pay particular attention to ideology, through what men were writing about women, their nature, rights, roles, education, speech and sexuality.

"Tudor England knew," writes Lacey Baldwin Smith, "that 'every woman would willingly be a man as every deformed wretch, a goodly and fair creature, and every idiot and fool, learned and wise.'"⁸ This comment conveys the sense of

⁵ *The Currency of Eros*, 1.

⁶ See "Protestant Wives, Catholic Saints, and the Devil's Handmaid."

⁷ "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" 176.

⁸ *Elizabeth Tudor: Portrait of a Queen* (London: Hutchinson, 1976), 68.

hierarchy inherent in gender awareness during the Renaissance. The number of words written on the subject during the period indicates the concern with female status, capabilities and nature: “[D]octrine on women was being delivered from the pulpit, in prayer books, in educational treatises, and household manuals,” in “a gamut of oral and printed forms” including “stage plays, popular ballads; advice and letters from parents; treatises in Latin, intended for fathers,... and magistrates; practical household handbooks and moralists’ pamphlets addressed to female audiences; best-selling satires pillorying rebellious women,” and “whether in poetry,... satire or literary theory, women were the subject of intense preoccupation in the Renaissance.”⁹ Recently, feminist scholarship has also started to examine non-literary texts such as private notebooks and court records.¹⁰ An example of the more extreme kind of writing about women is one of the pamphlets outlining often ingenious theories on women: Valens Acidalius’s 1595 pamphlet called, “*A new disputation against women, in which it is proved that they are not human beings.*”¹¹

Although there was a debate - women were defended as well as attacked - it was, overtly at least, a limited one, since fundamentally the knowledge that women were intellectually, physically and emotionally inferior to men was embedded in the culture’s common sense. “In the discourses of humanism and bourgeois family theory, the proper woman is an absence: legally she vanishes under the name and authority of her father and her husband; as daughter and wife, she is enclosed in the private household. She is silent and invisible: she does not speak and she is not spoken about.”¹² But there is often a discrepancy between theory and practice. In this case, it is clear that women, although within an oppressive socio-cultural regime, did practically find ways to speak between the lines drawn for them. Certainly, “part of the evidence” that women’s independence existed in the early modern period in ways that belie male writings about the way women should behave, “lies in the very frequency with which that independence was denounced.”¹³ Women were consistently

⁹ *Redeeming Eve*, xviii; *The Currency of Eros*, 12; and Kathleen McLuskie, qtd. “Preface,” 3, respectively.

¹⁰ “Constructing the Subject,” 18.

¹¹ Stevie Davies, *The Idea of Woman in Renaissance Literature: the Feminine Reclaimed* (Sussex: Harvester, 1986), 10.

¹² “Surprising Fame,” 74.

¹³ Keith Thomas, ‘The Changing Family,’ *The Times Literary Supplement*, 21 October 1977 p. 1226 qtd. *Oppositional Voices*, 8.

watched and as consistently muzzled (with both acts having behind their logic a deep fear of, and fascination with, female sexuality), at least in the contemporary theory about gender roles of the time, as will be seen. However, negotiated responses to the dominant ideology were, it seems, possible in practice, because some women did write, speak, have extra-marital affairs (Wroth is a case in point) and transgress the boundaries constructed to keep them in the domestic sphere (Ann Locke is a perfect example).

Indication of the amount of vitriol being written about women even before the dates with which I am concerned can be found in one woman's response to the anti-female sentiments circulating in print. One of the earliest Continental Renaissance women writers is Christine de Pizan who in 1405, in the first chapter of her book, The Book of the City of Ladies, "TELLS WHY AND FOR WHAT PURPOSE THIS BOOK WAS WRITTEN":

One day as I was sitting alone in my study... a strange volume came into my hands... [I]t discussed respect for women... [T]his book... made me wonder how it happened that so many different men - and learned men among them - have been and are so inclined to express both in speaking and in their treatises and writings so many wicked insults about women... They all concur in one conclusion: that the behaviour of women is inclined to and full of every vice... I began to examine my character and conduct as a natural woman and, similarly, I considered other women whose company I frequently kept, princesses, great ladies, women of the middle and lower classes... To the best of my knowledge... I could not see or realize how their claims could be true when compared to the natural behaviour and character of women. Yet I still argued vehemently against women, saying that it would be impossible that so many famous men - such solemn scholars, possessed of such deep and great understanding, so clear-sighted in all things, as it seemed - could have spoken falsely on so many occasions that I could hardly find a book on morals where... I did not find several chapters... attacking women, no matter who the author was. This reason alone... made me conclude that, although my intellect did not perceive my own great faults... because of its simpleness and ignorance... such was the case... And I finally decided that God formed a vile creature when He made woman, and I wondered how such a worthy artisan could have deigned to make such an abominable work which, from what they say, is the vessel as well as the refuge and abode of every evil and vice... I detested myself and the entire feminine sex, as though we were monstrosities...¹⁴

Accordingly she laments to God, and her prayers are answered by the appearance of three women who are, in fact, Reason, Rectitude and Justice. They commission her to build a city of ladies, which will refute all the charges against women by being peopled

¹⁴ The Book of the City of Ladies trans. Earl Jeffrey Richards (London: Pan, 1982), 3.

with great and famous women. "You resemble the fool in the prank who was dressed in women's clothes while he slept; because those who were making fun of him repeatedly told him he was a woman, he believed their false testimony more readily than the certainty of his own identity," they tell her.¹⁵ Beilin sees a very significant approach implied by de Pizan's central conceit. "The building of a city to glorify feminine virtue is a metaphor profoundly appropriate to the architects of a women's literary tradition in English. [Women's] writing reveals constant awareness of the masculine view of women and continually seeks to counter it."¹⁶ Indeed, Venetian nun and author of a treatise entitled *Simplicity Deceived or Paternal Tyranny* in 1654, Arcangela Tarabotti, wrote: "I who know may freely testify [that when] women are seen with pen in hand, they are met immediately with shrieks commanding a return to that life of pain which their writing had interrupted, a life devoted to the women's work of needle and distaff."¹⁷ Tarabotti's choice of metaphor may have been a direct response to *A mirrhor mete for all mothers, Matrones and Maidens*, published in 1579 by Thomas Salter, wherein he "proposed the 'Distaffe, and Spindle, Nedle and Thimble' as replacements for the pen,"¹⁸ although the opposition of pen and distaff appears to be a common one in the period. This had partly to do with theories of female nature, which, taken to their furthest extremes, rendered it not only inappropriate but absurd that women would want to write.

"Renaissance conceptions of the sexes were based on the Galenic principle of homology. That is, the genitals of men and women were considered to be basically the same, except that women's reproductive organs were internal, whereas men's were external to the body."¹⁹ Women were inferior men, since women's lack of heat accounted for their bodies not having the strength to externalise their sexual organs. This lack, a concept intrinsic to the Renaissance notion of femaleness, meant that women lacked rationality as well, and had to be carefully monitored to ensure that their over-emotional and over-sexual natures were controlled. The notion of lack may

¹⁵ *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 6.

¹⁶ *Redeeming Eve*, xv.

¹⁷ Margaret Ferguson *et al.*, *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourse of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), xv.

¹⁸ Tina Krontiris, "Breaking Barriers of Genre and Gender: Margaret Tyler's Translation of *The Mirrour of Knighthood*" in *English Literary Renaissance* 18.1 (1988), 21.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Harvey, *Ventriloquized Voices: Feminist Theory and English Renaissance Texts* (London: Routledge, 1992), 33.

be seen in the contemporary colloquialism for the vagina, naught or nothing - hence the pun in the opening quote of this chapter. Not only is there physically no-thing between a woman's legs, intellectually, taken to its misogynist extreme, a woman is nothing. And if, in theory, a woman is ultimately nothing, she can have nothing worthwhile to say to anyone, least of all her male superiors outside of her immediate domestic environment. The "public sphere of the written or spoken word" is "the place where women's speech is most visibly gendered and therefore prohibited."²⁰ Of course, there is more to this prohibition than a belief in female inferiority, and women clearly were not all caught within it. If that were the case, there would be no writing by women to discuss. In addition, there were proponents of female nature as worthy and powerful, although within problematically gender-specific definitional constraints.

Pamela Joseph Benson suggests that the starting point for examining such defensive texts about women is Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris*, "a collection of biographies of over one hundred famous secular women. This work was different... from any known postclassical work by any author... [and] forecast the attitude of the works that followed in its wake."²¹ Boccaccio's premise was that great women were great because they acted uncharacteristically like men in male fields. Benson suggests that works written in defense of women, in answer to the numerous texts written in a spirit of misogyny, can be broadly divided into two categories. "According to the first model,... [a] virtuous woman is masculine without violating nature and, in the most extreme versions of the theory, can compete on equal terms with men. The second model transforms qualities traditionally considered liabilities into assets. Women can be expected to be capable in a particularly female fashion because they are endowed with specifically female virtues."²² These terms of defense are revealing of dominant gender attitudes. That women could only be defended in terms of denying the prevailing notions of femininity on the one hand, or by remaining within the massive confines of these notions on the other, provoked a reaction in some women writers of the time. "[T]he concept of woman had a pervasive and crucial influence on women

²⁰ Sue Wiseman, "Unsilent instruments and the devil's cushions: authority in seventeenth-century women's prophetic discourse" in *New Feminist Discourses: Critical Essays on Theories and Texts* ed. Isobel Armstrong (London: Routledge, 1992), 176.

²¹ *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 1.

²² *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman*, 4.

writers in three principal ways: by motivating them to write; by circumscribing what they wrote and how they wrote it; and... by encouraging them to subvert cultural expectations of women's writing."²³

If pamphlets making oppressive, anti-female claims also provided the motivation for women writers to "subvert cultural expectations of women's writing," women must have been greatly stimulated to write towards the end of the sixteenth century and far into the seventeenth. *Hic Mulier* (the 'Mannish Woman'), a pamphlet that was published in February 1620, was concerned, as its title suggests, with women who are breaking codes by dressing like men, a vogue at the time that caused much contemporary concern. In a sermon in which he was obeying direct orders from King James to condemn such behaviour, the Bishop of London complained of women: "wearing of brode brimd hats, pointed dublets, theyre haire cut short or shorne, and some of them stillettaes or poinards."²⁴ "The terms of abuse" levelled at these 'mannish women' by the author of the *Hic Mulier* "contrast the immutable essence of Woman with the historical and cultural vicissitudes of fashion": "Let not a wandering and lasciuious thought read in an inticing Index [indicate] the contents of an unchaste volume" he writes. Harvey comments,

Women, like books, ought to disclose their subject matter only to the engaged reader, not lewdly advertise what is within to every passer-by. What the society most fears - especially a culture rent asunder by its epistemological, religious, and economic shifts that undermine its foundational certainties - is displaced onto the female body, where it is contained as the (stable) locus of unknowability. Like Lacanian lack, which is ascribed to Woman in order to secure the fiction of a coherent male subjectivity, the Jacobean female body is burdened with the anxieties of change and ambiguity that disturb its myth of itself as stable and knowable.²⁵

The pamphlet that answered *Hic Mulier* a week later was entitled *Haec-Vir*: in it the effeminate man tells the mannish woman, "if you will walke without difference, you shall live without reverence."²⁶

The ideological tool that probably had the most influence on "official male opinion about women" was education.²⁷ Although éducation until the nineteenth

²³ *Redeeming Eve*, xviii.

²⁴ Qtd. *Ventriloquized Voices*, 43.

²⁵ *Ventriloquized Voices*, 44-5, and 46, respectively.

²⁶ Qtd. *Ventriloquized Voices*, 48.

²⁷ "Protestant Wives, Catholic Saints, and the Devil's Handmaid," 204.

century was broadly confined to boys, there were educators in the Renaissance period who advocated education for girls and women. However, this was always qualified. The humanists advocating education for women often used as justification the notion that a woman trained in classical rationality would be more rational herself, and would thus make a better, more obedient and more pleasant wife. Indeed, the humanist writers who advocated education for women (and they were not necessarily in the majority, since men writing about women were mainly concerned with proscribing their conduct) assumed "women are lesser creatures belonging to the private domain."²⁸ Even Thomas More, perhaps the most liberal of all the humanist educators, commented that unless tended, a woman's brain was more likely to bear bracken than corn.²⁹

Richard Mulcaster wrote in 1581 that, although he supported education for girls, their education must be "kept within limits," "[u]nlike boys, whose education is 'without restraint for either matter or maner, bycause our employment is so generall in all things' ... Pointing out that sometimes girls' minds seem to ripen earlier than boys', [he asserts] 'yet it is not so. Their naturall weaknesse which cannot holde long, delivers very soone... Besides, their braines be not so much charged, neither with weight nor with multitude of matters, as boyes heades be, and therefore like empty caske[s] they make the greater noise.'"³⁰

A brief examination of what one of those humanists who advocated education for women had to say reveals a distinct sense of female Place. Juan Luis Vives, tutor to Catherine of Aragon and author of *Instruction of a Christen woman*, warns against allowing women access to imaginative literature.³¹ Poetry and Romance will threaten a woman's cardinal virtue, chastity, since her judgment is by nature weak and she might be swayed to emulate the adventures of which she reads. The French essayist Montaigne advocates the opposite, but for the same reasons:

If... it vexes them to cede to us in anything, and if they want to have their part of books, poetry is an amusement proper to their needs: it is a frivolous and crafty art, deceptive, talkative, all for pleasure, all for show, like them.³²

²⁸ *Redeeming Eve*, 4.

²⁹ Qtd. *The Idea of Woman in Renaissance Literature*, 25.

³⁰ Qtd. *Redeeming Eve*, 13.

³¹ *Redeeming Eve*, 4ff.

³² Qtd. *Seeking the Woman*, 213.

According to Vives, rhetoric should be avoided, since to teach a woman to speak eloquently risks allowing her access to the public sphere. All education, according to Vives, should enhance the female virtues of chastity, silence and obedience. In this he was “like every other sixteenth-century educator... focus[ing] women’s education on the development of her virtue, primarily defined as chastity, and with it, the attendant qualities of domesticity, privacy, and piety.”³³

In his *De Officio Mariti* of 1529, Vives warns husbands to monitor their wives’ reading habits, in order to ensure that the correct attitude conducive to peaceful domesticity was maintained. A wife who read too much was likely to be troublesome, therefore, “Let not thy wife be overmuch eloquent, nor full of her short and quick arguments, nor have the knowledge of all histories, nor understand many things, which are written. She pleaseth not me that giveth herself to poetry, and observing the art and manner of the old eloquence, doth desire to speak facundiously.”³⁴ Thomas Powell agreed. In an advice manual to a father, *The Art of Thriving, or the plaine path-way to preferment* (1635), he wrote, “Instead of Song and Musick, let them learne Cookery & Laundry, and in steade of reading Sir Philip Sidney’s *Arcadia*, let them read the grounds of good Huswifery. I like not a female poetesse at any hand.”³⁵ Noticeable is both Vives’ and Powell’s confidence in using their opinions to proscribe what should and should not be allowed to women; both end their soundbytes of advice with an illustration of personal preferment, as if that were enough recommendation or proof for husbands and fathers.

Vives also wrote about what boys should be taught, and the differences bear noting. In *De Tradendis Disciplinis* (1516), he stresses the importance of rhetoric for men. This is significant in a courtly culture where to speak well was to present yourself well, and to present yourself well and thus draw attention to yourself as a capable and educated man was the primary key to political and social power. Vives says:

Rhetoric is of the greatest influence and weight. It is necessary for all positions in life. For in man the highest law and government are at the disposal of will. To the will, reason and judgement are assigned as counsellors, and the emotions are its torches. Further, the emotions of the mind are enflamed by the sparks of speech. So, too, the reason is impelled and moved by speech. Hence it comes to

³³ *Redeeming Eve*, 5.

³⁴ Qtd. *The Currency of Eros*, 22.

³⁵ Qtd. *The Currency of Eros*, 25.

pass that, in the whole kingdom of the activities of man, speech holds in its possession a mighty strength, which it continually manifests.³⁶

"In his treatise," in spite of the fact that he advocates limited education for women, "Vives makes it quite clear that the purpose of all instruction for a woman is to make her a virtuous and wise wife, not a competitor in her husband's public world": "As for eloquence I have no great care, nor a woman nedeth it nat: but she nedeth goodness and wysedom."³⁷ Jones points out that the oppositions of the public and private realms as corresponding to immorality and dishonour (specifically in the form of poetry as a pernicious influence) on the one hand and decent behaviour on the other has to be explained - the connections are not obvious without an awareness of the cultural climate.³⁸ Jones details how the "assumption that learning and chastity are mutually exclusive points to the... obsession... that underlies the great majority of Renaissance pronouncements on women's speech and fame: female sexual purity."³⁹ Women's bodies were linked to their speech - the act of drawing attention to yourself through public speaking was equivalent to the act of presenting your body for male inspection and consumption. Thus, presumably, the vehement dislike of, and malicious attacks on, women who could present themselves well. The two meanings of intercourse come together exactly here. The important point is, of course, that female speech was deeply distrusted and therefore demonised, just as female sexuality was distrusted and presented as devouring if not circumscribed.

From about the middle of the seventeenth century, with the rise of Puritan patriarchalism, restrictions on a woman's place, behaviour and speech were tightened up (possibly indicating a backlash against the amount of public female activity that was beginning to take place). Richard Brathwaite, in *The English Gentlewoman*, wrote in 1631:

To enter into much discourse... with strangers argues lightness or indiscretion: what is said of maids may properly be applied to all women: They should be seen and not heard... What restraint is required in respect of the tongue [which he elsewhere calls "that glibbery member"] may appear by that ivory guard or garrison with which it is impaled. See how it is doubly warded, that it may with more reservancy and better security be restrained!⁴⁰

³⁶ Qtd. "Surprising Fame," 75.

³⁷ Qtd. *Oppositional Voices*, 6.

³⁸ "Surprising Fame," 76ff.

³⁹ "Surprising Fame," 76.

⁴⁰ Qtd. "Surprising Fame," 78.

This specific drive to “ward” and “restrain” female “members,” with all the connotations of that glibbery word, was not only present in the later part of the period, however. Thus the neurosis with which female speech was greeted was not only invoked by vocal, transgressing, and vocally transgressive, women who were emerging after a time of relative freedom into a world where the promises made by religious reformers were being revoked. Sir Thomas More, “arguably the most liberal of the early humanists,” writes in a letter to his daughter Margaret (herself a well-educated writer, but only within the spheres allowed women - translation - and known and admired for it by many men of the period as the epitome of the virtuous, obedient, wise woman⁴¹): “Content yourself with the profit and pleasure of your conscience, in your modesty you do not seek for the praise of the public, nor value it overmuch even if you receive it, but because of the great love you bear us, you regard us - your husband and myself - as a sufficiently large circle of readers for all that you write.”⁴²

Although these humanist ideas of education prescribed a private circle beyond which women could not theoretically step, there is a contradiction in humanist philosophy. That is the idea that women were inferior to men but could be educated into overcoming their inherently weak nature. Indeed, the “evasions” and “ambivalence” in humanist education treatises when it comes to women have been commented upon.⁴³ Other contradictions in ideologies of the period similarly created holes in their own discourses through which women could quietly (or not so quietly, in some cases) slip. The “fundamental contradiction” of the Reformation was that it simultaneously advocated women’s right to debate the scriptures and to be independent spiritual agents, and enforced a notion of the husband’s superiority; with the private world becoming a model of “the hierarchy that structured the public world.”⁴⁴ As God is to Man so Husband is to Wife, and thus theorists like William

⁴¹ Margaret More Roper was a humanist writer whose work has not survived. True to her image as the always appropriate perfect woman, she translated Erasmus’ *A devout treatise upon the Pater Noster* (*The Idea of Woman in Renaissance Literature*, 25). See also Beilin’s chapter on More Roper in *Redeeming Eve*.

⁴² Cf. *Redeeming Eve*, and *Oppositional Voices*, 6.

⁴³ The nouns are Lisa Jardine’s, “Cultural Confusion and Shakespeare’s learned Heroines: ‘These are old paradoxes’” in *Shakespeare Quarterly* 38 (Spring 1987), 18, qtd. “Constructing the Subject,” 17; and cf. *Oppositional Voices*, chapter one.

⁴⁴ *The Currency of Eros*, 14.

Tyndale decreed that a husband's orders to his wife were to be taken as from god.⁴⁵ Protestant ideology, although advocating spiritual equality, had always entrenched the idea of masculine superiority. "Luther and his fellow Protestant leaders wished to promote the dignity and importance of marriage, but not to infringe upon male supremacy. As a Puritan manual emphasized, 'we would that the man when he loveth should remember his superiority.'"⁴⁶ A basic principle running throughout the works of the theorists of mid-seventeenth century, when the more conservative elements of the Reformation's gender theories were finding voice, was the assumption as fact that women needed to be ruled by, and should publicly recognise their inferiority to, their husbands. The most extreme of these theories required that a woman acknowledge her husband's dominance physically, by bowing in his presence. However, the relationship of theory to the actual interactions that took place between women and their husbands and daughters and their fathers is as yet unclear. It is likely that actual relationships were not as formal and proscriptive as many of the male theoreticians would have preferred.⁴⁷

The Reformation did provide an opportunity for women to write in a sanctioned manner, albeit only about one subject, in a way that "created the vital link between women's traditional spirituality and their developing literary vocation... In the Reformed church, the figure of the pious woman, the 'learned and virtuous' lady who was chaste, patient, humble, and charitable became an ideal in which women found the perfect voice for public speaking."⁴⁸ And women used religion to authorise their right to write.

A perfect example that this kind of writing was considered proprietous can be seen in the fact that a translation written by the eleven-year-old Elizabeth Tudor was published in 1548 as *A Godly Medytacyon of the christen sowle concerninge a love towarde God and hys Christe*. Of course, the fact that the publisher, John Bale, "had perceived the Reformist potential of Elizabeth's translation and printed it to lend the weight of her position to the cause"⁴⁹ contributed to the fact that her work was made public. The future Queen Elizabeth had intended her translation as a New Year's

⁴⁵ *Oppositional Voices*, 8-9.

⁴⁶ "Protestant Wives, Catholic Saints, and the Devil's Handmaid," 205.

⁴⁷ *Oppositional Voices*, 6-8.

⁴⁸ *Redeeming Eve*, 48-9.

⁴⁹ *Redeeming Eve*, 67.

present to her stepmother. She may or may not have been aware that it was a politically useful tool, as long as she expressed herself within a containing sphere - the appropriate religious expression allowed those of the female sex. Such a prescription was the perfect way of allowing a woman writer power, power that could be utilised by the men in charge, only within the bounds of expressing spiritual purity, a 'natural' and condoned part of womanliness. And so it is that most of the work written by women in the later half of the period "consists of religious compositions and translations."⁵⁰ Religious translation offered a starting point for women writers to define their own tradition; it was an important part of the developing tradition of women's writing. An educated woman could express herself behind the words of a male author in a way that would not apparently compromise her own decorous silence. This was always providing she translate only that which was considered appropriate, however. In 1578, Margaret Tyler translated the Spanish Romance, *A Mirrour of Princely deedes and Knighthood*. She was the first woman in England to publish a prose romance, and thus is in some way linked generically to Wroth (who wrote her own prose romance), although it is probably impossible to determine whether Wroth read or was aware of her work. The difference is, of course, that Tyler's is a translation, and therefore a more passive version of Wroth's activity. Nevertheless, Tyler's defense prefacing her translation reveals that she is aware that she has contravened her 'appropriate' sphere of interest. She defends herself both for having translated a book about "a matter more manlike then becommeth my sex," that is the immoral subject of chivalric romance, and for having chosen a non-religious subject, "a story prophane... before matters of more importance."⁵¹

Wroth's aunt, Mary Sidney, who may have been her godmother and/or namesake⁵² and whose own writing career must have influenced Wroth,⁵³ herself translated the Psalms of David. In a poem to Queen Elizabeth, written to accompany a presentation manuscript of the Psalms, Mary Sidney presents her achievements as a continuation of her brother Philip's:

Then these the Postes of Dutie and Goodwill

⁵⁰ *Oppositional Voices*, 10.

⁵¹ Qtd. "Breaking Barriers of Genre and Gender," 23.

⁵² Josephine Roberts, *The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 15.

⁵³ See Margaret Hannay, "'Your vertuous and learned Aunt': The Countess of Pembroke as a Mentor to Mary Wroth" in *Reading Mary Wroth*.

shall presse to offer what their Senders owe;
 Which once in two, now in one Subject goe,
 the poorer left, the richer reft awaye...
 but hee did warpe, I weav'd this webb to end;
 the stuffe not ours, our worke no curious thing,
 Wherein yet well wee thought the Psalmist King...
 And I the Cloth in both our names present (*ll.* 19-33).⁵⁴

By expressly stating that she is involved in presenting words at least co-written by not one but two men, she places herself behind both David and her dead brother. But there is still the soft insistence of her own agency in the presentation. She says she is the lesser of the two talents when compared to Philip: he is "the richer" who has been "reft awaye" by death, and she is "the poorer" writer who is "left." Nevertheless, she specifically says that she finished the psalms alone, and the fact that she uses the word "but," here meaning "only," to describe Philip's contribution to the "warp" of the text emphasises that she "weav'd this webb to end." So although Mary Sidney speaks of her brother, telling the queen that "wee" wrote this, not "I", and although she specifically notes that the content is translation, she once again returns to the fact that the final work is hers. She takes the public step of presenting "the Cloth," albeit "in both our names." Significantly, the critical tradition seems to view the translation of the Psalms as Mary Sidney's, not Mary and Philip's: "*Her* metrical versions of the Psalms... have been preserved" says Roberts of the translation.⁵⁵

Although religious translations were socially acceptable, the act of writing itself was a loaded and difficult one for women to negotiate. It is not surprising that the persona of the virtuous woman dominates the writing of the women of the period, when the act of writing and the concomitant learning it displayed placed a woman at risk of seeming sexually and socially transgressive. To write at all was to be unfeminine.⁵⁶ This was felt to such an extent that both the women writers and their publishers often apologised for the act of writing itself.

Anne Cooke Bacon, mother of Francis, had a translation of sermons published in about 1551. Her publisher's dedication reveals his anxiety, and his need to assert

⁵⁴ The Penguin Book of Renaissance Verse 1509-1659 ed. H.R. Woodhuysen and David Norbrook (London: Penguin, 1993), 131.

⁵⁵ The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth, 15, my emphasis.

⁵⁶ See Janet Todd, The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing and Fiction 1660-1800 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 1.

her 'feminine modesty' despite the fact that she is in circulation. "In his address to 'the Christen Reader,' he describes Cooke... as a 'wel occupied Jentelwoman, and verteouse mayden... whose shamfastnes would rather have suprest theym [the sermons], had not I to whose handes they were commytted halfe agaynst her wyll put them fourth.'"⁵⁷ The facts of Bacon's life, which would seem to suggest an ambitious, intelligent woman who wished both to further her sons' careers and perhaps live vicariously through them,⁵⁸ are less important than the obvious need to reclaim the traditionally virtuous and controlled female private domestic space challenged by the very act of publication.

"Women's appearance in print and the attached permissions and prohibitions were closely linked to Renaissance notions regarding sexuality, authorship, and female inferiority. Publication was directly linked to aggressive sexuality: to appear in print was to appear in public and hence also to seek male attention."⁵⁹ Indeed, many women were accused of appropriating work they themselves did not write, since the intellectual inferiority of women and, presumably, the attempts to confine them to domestic life thus limiting their realms of experience, made it difficult to believe that women could write well. It is therefore especially important that Wroth published, and stood by her actions publicly, and appended no apology to her *Urania* at any time before, during, or after the allegations made against her character during the course of the outcry against her.

And so, despite all the apparent odds, women did write, and did write that which they were told was forbidden them. Like Wroth in her sonnet sequence, other women wrote in verse. That there were so few who did so at this time can be accounted for not only because of the social prohibitions, but owing to the lack of a poetic community.

In the case of women writers,... the choice of verse was highly significant... To write poetry, a woman had to breach the convention that poets were male: she had to overcome her lack of formal training, the self-inhibiting realization that women poets were a novelty, the attendant fear of censure, and perhaps most difficult, she had to present herself publicly in an authoritative role.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ *Redeeming Eve*, 56.

⁵⁸ *Redeeming Eve*, 61.

⁵⁹ *Oppositional Voices*, 17.

⁶⁰ *Redeeming Eve*, 87.

Love poetry in particular was an “especially transgressive”⁶¹ genre for women to choose, because it was ostensibly the private expression of inner feelings, but was highly concerned with power.⁶² More especially, to publish love poems was openly to express desire, and often extra-marital desire at that, and to allow both the expression and the desire to be circulated before the public gaze.

But there were other, older, issues facing women writers as well. Krontiris sees the lack of an appropriate language as one of the major problems facing women writing in the early modern period: “The absence of a linguistic idiom that could both express women’s desires and serve as a medium of effective criticism of dominant ideology is a great obstacle.”⁶³ In a linked concept, Jones talks of the lack of what she calls “pre-poetics,” which are “the conditions necessary for writing at all.”⁶⁴ The point is that women writers, even those who spoke out against oppressive gender theories and practices, had inherited concepts of femininity which both they and their language had internalised, so that often the only expression available to them had to reflect ideological imperatives. An example is Wroth’s persona’s ultimate acceptance of chastity as the most desirable state. Furthermore, and once again Wroth furnishes a perfect example, the generic structures women writers inherited often could not easily accommodate female voices. Combining both these notions, a female contemporary of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, is quoted as saying, “Sure the poore woman is a little distracted, shee could never bee soe ridiculous else as to venture at writing book’s and in verse too...”⁶⁵ Ironically, Cavendish was determined to write in order to achieve fame,⁶⁶ and although she was roundly defamed for this ambition, that she did write in verse indicates that it was a field women were breaking into.

The early modern period was a time of great change, socially, economically and politically, and opinions about women were also in flux. Across a period of roughly a hundred and fifty dynamic years, ideas were not of course static, and changes in attitudes towards women were so great as to have engendered critical

⁶¹ *The Currency of Eros*, 7.

⁶² Cf. “‘Love is not love.’”

⁶³ *Oppositional Voices*, 142.

⁶⁴ “Surprising Fame,” 74.

⁶⁵ Qtd. John Veltz, “Giving Voices to the Silent: Editing the Private Writings of Women” in *New Ways of Looking at Old Texts*, 271.

⁶⁶ See Todd’s “Introduction.”

disagreement about whether, following a period of relative freedom within the period with the beginnings of Protestantism, there was a more conservative backlash that effectively clamped down on women's freedom of expression, or whether reactionary religious and political movements did not succeed in stemming a tide that had already started to swell. There seem to be two opposing critical senses as to which way the tide moved for women as the Elizabethan age moved into the Jacobean, and closer to Wroth's time. On the one hand, the humanist educational principles had been advocated and in some cases put into effect, resulting in the impression that, "The Jacobean period was a time of advances in the status of women... Many more women than before were receiving some form of education, and more female precedents had been established in publishing and patronizing books."⁶⁷ However, not only was the misogyny of the (probably homosexual) new king a problem, the retraction of many of the promises made by the early reformers was significantly changing the apparent freedoms that had been assured to women earlier in the period. "By the early seventeenth century, remarks on women's speech suggest that an intensification of prohibitions was underway... where the Protestant focus on marital duties intensified surveillance over daughters and wives."⁶⁸ It is not incompatible to imagine that the reality was probably somewhere between the two; women had begun to write, not only domestic or religious texts and translations, and they were not about to return obediently to silence. The very vehemence of the later invectives against female speech testify to this fact. However, there was a conservative swing in what was being theorised about women's place and appropriate behaviour, and no doubt many women were affected by this as well.

In general, then, along with the previous influences of the medieval Christian conception of women always carrying the sin of Eve, partly mitigated in the early modern period by the emphasis on motherhood as a spiritually significant role, and the Protestant claims (at least initially) of spiritual equality for all,

are the new requirements for feminine conduct propagated in the course of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The woman is seen increasingly as a means of guaranteeing family property and honour. Accordingly, female passive qualities are emphasized, especially that of chastity. In the many male-written manuals and conduct books, women are repeatedly warned about the dangers of

⁶⁷ *Oppositional Voices*, 102.

⁶⁸ *The Currency of Eros*, 78.

sexual transgression. Sexual purity is linked to a woman's speech. The quality of silence... is one of the principal virtues in dominant discourse... Altogether, woman was seen in terms of her function as a wife and a mother, not as a human being with needs and desires of her own. Voicing opinion in public or participating in male activities was usually forbidden.⁶⁹

In this context, Wroth's transgression in writing The Countess of Montgomery's Urania, a lengthy prose work of romance that comments on political action in court life and criticises the behaviour of its men, can be truly appreciated.

Lady Mary Wroth has been seen by many critics as being the first woman writer to define herself as such. This is due not only to her groundbreaking creation of a Petrarchan woman lover and ruler in a political, courtly setting but to the fact that she defended herself against censure when the Urania was published. Gary Waller and Naomi Miller, in their Introduction to Reading Mary Wroth write, "The career of Mary Wroth... exemplifies the complex limitations and possibilities which faced a woman determined to achieve some significant degree of agency within a seemingly irresistible patriarchal... social formation."⁷⁰ This is certainly true of the events of her life. Wroth was born Mary Sidney in about 1587. She was the niece of Philip Sidney, and her sonnet sequence displays the influence of his Astrophil and Stella.⁷¹ Throughout her life Wroth associated herself, and was associated with, the Sidney family, retaining the Sidney arrowhead in her coat of arms even after her marriage, and extolled as the continuation of her uncle's family's literary talents by many writers of the time, both those in search of patronage and as pure flattery.⁷² It is probably the fact that she came from a personally supportive and politically powerful family, as well as one that encouraged literary endeavour, that enabled Wroth to behave as she did, and this despite the fact that aristocratic women were in some senses even less free to transgress than women of lower social orders, because they had a lot more to lose. They were ciphers representing their fathers' property and prestige, and as such were strictly controlled.⁷³ Krontiris suggests that Wroth's decision to write in outmoded genres popularised by her uncle's enormous successes, and in ways that often closely

⁶⁹ Oppositional Voices, 5-6.

⁷⁰ Reading Mary Wroth, 1.

⁷¹ However, Roberts' gloss in her edition of the poems over-emphasises this influence, making many of the poems read simply as derivative by stressing related themes in Astrophil and Stella, and thus obscuring the workings of the poems of Wroth's sequence in relation to each other.

⁷² See Roberts' "Introduction" to The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth.

⁷³ Oppositional Voices, 61.

mirror his stylistic decisions - pastoral prose and love sonnets - can be seen as a limitation implicit in using the Sidney name to authorise her writing.⁷⁴

Of her marriage to Robert Wroth in 1604, Jonson wrote, "My Lady wroth is unworthily married on a Jealous husband."⁷⁵ Wroth was a patron and also good friend to Jonson. They were close enough for the nature of their relationship to be speculated about.⁷⁶ However, it was with her first cousin, William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke (a suggested, although unlikely, candidate for Shakespeare's WH) that she had two illegitimate children after her husband's death. Wroth also wrote what sound like letters suggesting a romantic liaison to the English Ambassador to the Hague (probably written after both her marriage and her affair were over; as Roberts says, she seemed "determined not to be a reclusive widow.")⁷⁷

By the time Robert Wroth died in 1614, his estate was deeply in debt. He left Wroth with a jointure that, on the death of her two-year-old son in 1616, reverted to the next male Wroth, Robert's brother John. With no financial resources besides her famous maiden name, then, it was left to the new widow to try and pay off a debt of 23,000 pounds,⁷⁸ as well as maintain her estate, which she did with great difficulty by using her considerable influence. (The fact that she later paid for the retrieval of all the published copies of the *Urania* herself indicates the seriousness of the outcry against her.) The Wroths had to rely on Mary's contacts even during their marriage. Having been a member of Queen Anne's close circle (she had participated in Jonson's controversial *Masque of Blackness*,⁷⁹ written especially for Anne and a group of her friends), Wroth wrote to the Queen asking for an extension on Robert's behalf to pay the lease on his estate. She wrote:

The infinite favours which from you I have reseeded..., beesides knowing how willingly the kinge will heare your Majestie I thus farr presume as humbly to beseech you thus much to bee pleased to recommende this petition of mr. Wrothes to the kinge, your Majestie beeing the only help wheron I dare rely... mr wrothes sute beeing but this, that itt may please the king to grant him a longer estate in itt, to avoide all feare of having itt taken over his head...⁸⁰

⁷⁴ *Oppositional Voices*, 122.

⁷⁵ Qtd. *The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth*, 17.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth*, 26.

⁷⁸ *Oppositional Voices*, 123.

⁷⁹ See Suzanne Gosset, " 'Man-maid, begone!': Women in Masques" in *English Literary Renaissance* 18.1 (1988).

⁸⁰ Qtd. *The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth*, 233.

This shows not only her dire financial situation and her close relationship to the powers that be (or, more precisely, its wife), but also her rhetorical ability, which she employs in ways that Vives had exhorted only boys be taught. Her skill in presenting her suit as well as her friendships in high places were obviously maintained after her husband's death, because "[e]very year after 1623 she obtained a royal order protecting her from creditors."⁸¹ However, she lost favour as a courtier and by the end of her life was no longer part of Anne's intimate circle, probably due to the scandal of publicly publishing herself in ways that directly flaunted the status quo - through her *Urania* and through bearing two illegitimate children.

Wroth died in 1653, leaving two children (a son and a daughter, both of whom were looked after by the Sidney family); a play called *Loves Victorie*; *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, the second part of which is incomplete; and *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, the sonnet sequence appended to the *Urania*, and the work with which I am concerned. She had also endured a public scandal over the publication of the *Urania*, the reasons for and conclusions of which reveal telling details about the ways in which she violated the codes of propriety for a woman writer.

We do not know to what extent she was involved in its publication, but published it was, in 1621. Its many references to contemporary events were noted with disapproval by the men of the court. Sir Aston Cokayne described it as "repleat/ with elegancies, but too full of heat," and John Chamberlaine, a court correspondent, "commented on the author's audacity in taking 'great libertie or rather licence to traduce whom she please,' [and] warned that while she may think she 'daunces in a net', she risks falling to disaster."⁸² One of the events to which she makes overt reference is the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury, in 1613, "a scandal of such proportions that it stunned the entire Jacobean court."⁸³ The married Francis Howard, Countess of Essex, was the mistress of Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset. Carr revealed their affair to a friend, Sir Thomas Overbury, and in Wroth's account, "the [unnamed] noblewoman [of her text] was so outraged to learn that her lover would confide the

⁸¹ Carolyn Ruth Swift, "Feminine identity in Lady Mary Wroth's romance *Urania*" *ELR* 14.3 (1984), 328-46 qtd. *Oppositional Voices*, 125.

⁸² Qtd. Josephine Roberts, "Lady Mary Wroth's *Urania*: A Response to Jacobean Censorship" in *New Ways of Looking at Old Texts*, 126.

⁸³ Qtd. "Lady Mary Wroth's *Urania*," 127.

secret of their relationship to another that she vowed revenge against anyone who would so cruelly use her. The account... thus stopped short of the actual murder of Overbury."⁸⁴ The public outrage Wroth caused cannot have been aided by the fact that her presentation of the event "is distinguished by her use of the first-person to explore [the motivations of the gentlewoman character in the *Urania*] and to present a sympathetic portrayal of her as a victim of passion and betrayal."⁸⁵ But her examination and censure of court events eventually and inevitably got her into trouble.

Edward Denny, Baron of Waltham, accused Wroth of slandering his family in one of the episodes in the *Urania*.

Denny's only daughter, Honora, was married in 1607 to James Hay... a Scottish courtier who held the favour of King James... [Wroth] describes the... trials of Lord Hay's marriage, including his wife's adultery and the intervention of his father-in-law, Lord Denny, who threatened the life of his only daughter. Later she died... In retelling the episodes [Wroth] spares no pains in exposing the violent behaviour of both Lord Denny and James Hay.⁸⁶

Denny wrote Wroth a poem, the original title of which referred to the relevant characters in her *Urania*. "To Pamphilia from the father-in-law of Seralius" also appeared in seventeenth-century commonplace books under the title, "To the Lady Mary Wroth for writeing the Countes of Montgomeryes Urania."⁸⁷ Denny's main terms of censure are revealing. He attempts to cow her into submission by attacking her behaviour in terms of her gender and advising her to stick to writing about religious matters, no doubt a nod in the direction of her famous aunt Mary Sidney. He says:

Hermaphrodite in show, in deed a monster
As by thy words and works all men may conster
Thy wrathful spite conceived an idle book...
Wherein thou strikes at some mans noble blood
thine...
...vain comparison for want of wit
Takes up the oystershell to play with it
Yet common oysters such as thine gape wide
And take in pearls or worse at every tide...
How easy wer't to pay thee with thine own
Returning that which thou thy self hast thrown

⁸⁴ *The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth*, 36.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ "Lady Mary Wroth's *Urania*," 31-2.

⁸⁷ "Lady Mary Wroth's *Urania*," 33.

And write a thousand lies of thee at least...
 By which thy plainly seest in thine own glass
 How easy tis to bring a lie to pass
 Thus hast thou made thyself a lying wonder
 Fools and their babbles seldom part asunder
 Work o'the Works leave idle books alone
 For wise and worthier women have written none.⁸⁸

Her act of writing negates her femininity, making her a hermaphrodite and a monster. Worse than this, his reference to her "common oyster" gaping wide to receive all the rubbish of the sea can be read not only as an attack on her mind and her ability to reason, but as an insulting and pornographic slur on her sexual activities. Wroth may have had illegitimate children with a man with whom she had a personal relationship for most of her life, but Denny's insult implies that she is indiscriminately sexually available. He thus attempts to undermine what she has written by implying she is a shameful failure to her sex.

Wroth's reply was a poem that copies the rhymes of Denny's line for line.

Called "Railing Rimes returned upon the Author by Mistress Mary Wroth," it replies:

Hermaphrodite in sense in Art a monster
 As by your railing rimes the world may conster
 Your spiteful words against a harmless book
 Shows that an ass much like the sire doth look
 Men truly noble fear no touch of blood...
 Can such comparisons seem the want of wit
 When oysters have enflamed your blood with it
 But it appears your guiltiness gaped wide
 And filled with dirty doubt your brains swollen tide...
 How easily do you now receive your own
 Turned on your self from whence the squib was thrown...
 By which you live to see in your own glass
 How hard it is for you to lie and pass
 Thus you have made yourself a lying wonder
 Fools and their pastimes should not part asunder
 Take this then now let railing rimes alone
 For wise and worthier men have written none.

Since she cannot return the attack in a specifically gendered manner, because he has not transgressed socially accepted gender norms, she instead shows him to be a fool. Despite, or perhaps because of the fact that she is clearly cleverer than he, a better rhetorician and writer, able to throw his insults back in his face without resorting to

⁸⁸ This poem, and its reply, are from The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth, 32-35.

his dirty tactics, the story does not have a happy ending. The Urania was retracted in December of the year it was published. This was perhaps due to Wroth's weakened socio-political status as she battled to make ends meet as an impoverished widow, banished from courtly favour. She expended a fair amount of energy trying to reclaim all the copies of the Urania. Indeed, the situation was so grave she had to appeal to the powerful friends she still had. In her letter to the politically influential Duke of Buckingham⁸⁹ she says: "My Lord, ... I have with all care caused the sale of [my booke] to bee forbidden... which from the first were solde againste my minde I never purposing to have had them published."⁹⁰ Whether or not this is true, she asks Buckingham to procure her the king's warrant to force all copies of the book in circulation to be returned. "Her own needs and the needs of her illegitimate children... forced her to depend on the king's goodwill all her life... Naturally, then, she had to withdraw her book from sale, in spite of her jaunty defense and the hours she spent writing it."⁹¹ The extent of the displeasure she had incurred may be inferred from a letter she wrote to William Feilding, Earl of Denbigh, in which she enclosed copies of both of the furious letters Denny had sent her, in the first of which he tells her to

repent you of so many ill spent years of so vaine a booke and... redeeme the tyme with writing as large a volume of heavenly lays and holy love as you have of lascivious tales and amorous toyes." Significantly, he invokes her aunt, "who translated so many godly books and especially the holly psalmes of David, that no doubt now shee sings in the quier of Heaven those devine meditations... which being left us heer on earth will begett hir dayley more and more glory in heaven as others by [*whome*] <them> shalbe enlightened... with which prayer for you I end."⁹²

Denny is invoking the commonplace stereotype of the pious woman, with its concomitant implication that a woman's only active duty is to spiritually uplift others with her purity and goodness. Thus that Wroth wrote about "lascivious tales" instead of "holy love" is not only outrageous but selfish and unnatural. Davies says that in James I's reign, what she calls female "magic" (meaning, I think, power), "was reinterpreted by that woman-hating, hag-ridden Scot as black and demonic."⁹³ If this

⁸⁹ He was "the King's favorite," according to Josephine Roberts in "Labyrinths of Desire" in Women's Studies 19 (1991), 184.

⁹⁰ Qtd. "Labyrinths of Desire," 236.

⁹¹ Carolyn Ruth Swift qtd. Oppositional Voices, 125.

⁹² Qtd. The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth, 239.

⁹³ The Idea of the Woman in Renaissance Literature, 28.

metaphor is even half-accurate, Wroth chose a difficult time indeed in which to venture into the public realm. Indeed, despite her best attempts at appealing to people in power whom she knew or with whom she had connections, the king did eventually step in and she was forced to call in all the copies of the manuscript. In her letter to Feilding, Wroth also included copies of the poems, with Denny's insulting remarks and her clever reply, "in hope that through his influence with James, [Feilding] might 'make all well with his Majestie.'"⁹⁴ Denny triumphantly writes to her,

Madam. I will make no further replie to your distempers; I but still profess and ever be redie to justifie what in my letter I have averred. You may have heard I doubt not by some of your best frends what hath come to the Kings eares... Thus without your Ladyships further trouble I still must rest;/ Your truly well wishing frend/ if you could think so/ Edward Denny.⁹⁵

The Denny incident "shows... how a female writer's choice of genre and treatment of subject matter cannot be properly understood without reference to her sex,"⁹⁶ if only because the terms in which the scandal was expressed are directly linked to the fact that Wroth had publicly transgressed the limits proscribed for her sex. Wroth may have been publicly silenced, but privately she continued to express herself, writing a second part to her *Urania* that is incomplete and, not surprisingly, remained unpublished in her lifetime. Although her behaviour was remarkable given the constraints under which she was operating as a woman writer, she was unfortunately truly an exception. Educated women, especially those who wrote, had long been encouraged to think of themselves as anomalies, as women engaged in masculine activities that at best ill befitted them. "[T]he conventional view [was] that a woman must dare to step out of her sphere to write and that she becomes a comet flashing once across the sky, not a steady beacon of light to guide other women."⁹⁷ This was the case with Wroth. "Wroth's book does not appear to have influenced other women writers, either in content or form, perhaps because she withdrew it... [T]he times seemed not to elicit concern for the virtuous woman's ability to rule kingdoms and write sonnets [both of which Wroth's heroine Pamphilia did with great skill], but instead, for the very fundamentals of traditional feminine identity."⁹⁸ Fame, in

⁹⁴ "Lady Mary Wroth's *Urania*," 126.

⁹⁵ Qtd. *The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth*, 241.

⁹⁶ *Oppositional Voices*, 125.

⁹⁷ *Redeeming Eve*, 11.

⁹⁸ *Redeeming Eve*, 247.

Renaissance iconography, was a winged woman, but fame was not appropriate for women according to the gender ideology of the time.⁹⁹

Thus it can be seen that the overriding sexual climate of the early modern period, as oppressive as it might have been, did not succeed in entirely confining women to the domestic sphere. Women *were* taught, and many taught themselves. Many found expression through the religious writings opened up to them by the political changes of the Reformation. And Wroth was not the only Englishwomen to defy her context as best she could, although she is perhaps the most spectacular. Jones speaks of the “canny compromisers” who worked their ways by indirection through the prohibitions of their literary culture.¹⁰⁰

The critical debate about the actual power enjoyed by women in the early modern period suggests that, although notions of degree may vary, most scholars of the period agree that women were not in practice as disempowered as they were in theory. Kroutiris and Ferguson *et al.* are not as convinced as Kelly-Gadol that the notion of a period of rebirth did not apply to women: “recent historians and researchers increasingly draw our attention to facts about Renaissance women’s behaviour in real life, and the discrepancy between the private and the public image”.¹⁰¹ Jones adds the cautionary, “If women had a Renaissance, it was a problematic one, fraught with prohibitions arising from the conflicting interests of emergent social groups.”¹⁰² Of the amount being written about women in the period, Davies says that the idea of the feminine, at least in the literature and drama of the time, was highly valued in the Renaissance. She says this is because of its Classical influences: “In the Renaissance period, Love was at the centre, ... so it followed that the female principle was at the centre, invested with a new sanctity which came not so much from the Cult of the Blessed Virgin as from the mystery religions of the ancient world”.¹⁰³ Davies says she accepts as true the real subordination of women in the world outside literature. Nevertheless she still asserts that male authors could be “feminist” in a certain sense, because they valued “the female principle.” She does not appear to acknowledge that the creation of Images or Ideas of women in the art and

⁹⁹ “Surprising Fame,” 74.

¹⁰⁰ “Surprising Fame,” 80.

¹⁰¹ *Oppositional Voices*, 3.

¹⁰² *The Currency of Eros*, 14.

¹⁰³ *The Idea of the Woman in Renaissance Literature*, 4.

literature of the time is no less oppressive for sometimes being idealising. In addition, Davies too simplistically and unproblematically interprets the myths, writings and art of ancient Greece and Rome, which many other scholars cite as a locus of renewed misogyny in the Renaissance.¹⁰⁴ The point is, then, that while women may have had strategies in which they could write, speak and move outside the domestic sphere, it is too much to talk, as Davies does, of “The Feminine Reclaimed” in this period.

Criticising ‘traditional’ history for ignoring the issue of female experience of the period, the editors of Rewriting the Renaissance say, “What is at stake in a revaluation of the Renaissance is the possibility of a fuller, more historically grounded understanding of the socioeconomic system under which we now live.”¹⁰⁵ We see the period anew, with “Joan Kelly-Gadol’s notion of a feminist ‘double vision’: when we ‘look at ages or movements of great social change in terms of the liberation or repression of women’s potential,’ she writes, ‘the period or set of events with which we deal takes on a wholly different character or meaning from the normally accepted one.’”¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, “[b]y discovering or recovering previously ignored cultural documents, frequently by women who are considered to be ‘minor’ figures [women such as Christine de Pizan or Arcangela Tarabotti, not to mention Wroth, who is certainly not a minor figure] feminists mount a challenge to the very notion of canonical tradition.”¹⁰⁷ This recovery work is still being done. The importance of recognising the gendered nature of subjectivity has not yet fully been realised by the mainstream critical movement within Renaissance studies. This is despite the fact that what is the scholastic mainstream in the mid-nineties, was itself considered avant-garde ten years ago when Ferguson *et al.* wrote this challenge. The storming of the fort of literary history they envisaged is still very much in process.

¹⁰⁴ See “Did Women Have a Renaissance” and “Protestant Wives, Catholic Saints and the Devil’s Handmaid” in Becoming Visible, as well as Marylin Arthur’s essay in the same book.

¹⁰⁵ Rewriting the Renaissance, xvi.

¹⁰⁶ Qtd. Rewriting the Renaissance, xxii.

¹⁰⁷ Rewriting the Renaissance, xxi.

Chapter 3: “Petrarke hed and prince”: Inheritance and Interaction in Wroth’s Sonnets

Now when I speake that which neither I my selfe thinke to be true, nor would
haue any other body beleewe, it must needs be a great dissimulation... if we fall a
praying, especially of our mistresses vertue, bewtie, or other good parts, we be
allowed now and then to over-reach a little by way of comparison

-George Puttenham *The Arte of English Poesie*¹

“O Petrarke hed and prince of Poets all”

- Tottel’s 1557 *Miscellany*²

Petrarchanism is a discourse of erotic desire which “sees love as a frustrating though inspiring experience, characterized by a melancholy yet obsessive balance between desire and hopelessness, possibility and frustration.”³ It is also a means to express lack as a desire for other kinds of relationships, political in nature; Petrarchan discourse was at its most popular in England when it could be used as a means to garner the favour and favours of a Queen whose ruling mythology of personal and state power was largely dependent on the notion of the Virgin Queen, an Ideal which is in many ways similar to the Idea of woman necessary to Petrarchan poetry. I am concerned with the ways in which the Petrarchan tradition used this Idea, and the implications this has for Wroth’s poetics as a woman writing within this specifically gendered genre. By first examining the connection between political and erotic desire as it was expressed in Petrarchanism from the genre’s inception, and then by exploring how Wroth’s Pamphilia speaks, and is spoken by, the language she inherits as a Petrarchan lover, I hope to make clear the notion that the English Petrarchanism Wroth inherited was a gendered discourse, and that the poetic subjectivity it created cannot easily accommodate a speaking female poet.

Dubrow warns that “defining Petrarchism [is] a perilous enterprise,”⁴ and because of the complex and ambivalent nature of the tradition, prefers to call the many poetic responses to Petrarchanism, “counterdiscourses”⁵ rather than anti- or para-

¹ Qtd. Sara J. Eaton, “Presentations of Women in the English Popular Press” in *Ambiguous Realities* ed. Carol Levin and Jeannie Watson (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 169.

² Qtd. *English Poetry in the Sixteenth Century*, 76.

³ *English Poetry in the Sixteenth Century*, 78.

⁴ *Echoes of Desire*, 6.

⁵ *Echoes of Desire*, 8.

Petrarchan, since, she points out, following Ilona Bell, such poetry can never be a-Petrarchan.⁶ Wroth's poetry, then, is a Petrarchan counter-discourse, and it is in the exploration of what this means specifically in Pamphilia to Amphilanthus that any rigorous definition will be attempted. This is because to attempt a holistic definition of Petrarchanism is to write a book on Renaissance love poetry, since the discourse and its counterdiscourses inform the very notion of writing about love in the early modern period. My discussion will assume that what the English poets inherited was a tradition mediated through 200 years of Continental use and interpretation, combined with aspects of medieval theories of love and traditions of poetry that existed alongside Petrarch's work. Thus, Petrarchanism does not follow directly on from Petrarch, although it certainly begins with him. I would like also to differentiate between the textuality of Petrarchanism - what the form *can* say and do - and how the reality of the social situation at the time informs the Petrarchan discourse Wroth inherited. In other words, Petrarchanism as a form does not disallow a female speaker, but the socio-historical rules that governed gender roles and appropriate spheres of behaviour did complicate the position of publicly speaking female poet.

Francesco Petrarch was born in Italy in 1304. His poems to Laura in the *Rime Sparse* that were to be so influential to an entire tradition of love, were started in the 1340s and finally formalised into a collection "almost twenty years later," after Laura's death. They underwent further modifications shortly before his death in 1374. Despite almost 30 years of devotion to her in his writing, Petrarch probably only knew Laura as an acquaintance.⁷ His poems were so popular that Renaissance poetic style across Europe was influenced by what may, probably most accurately, be called a "(mis)reading of Petrarch", that is, Petrarchanism,⁸ the discourse of love and power that draws many of its traditional notions and modes of expression from Petrarch's poems to Laura.

Waller talks of the "powerful literary space" that Petrarchanism became, "especially in the last quarter of the [sixteenth] century."⁹ One of the reasons Petrarchanism is a powerful space is the fact that it accommodates the expression of

⁶ Echoes of Desire, 7.

⁷ English Poetry in the Sixteenth Century, 76-77.

⁸ English Poetry in the Sixteenth Century, 77.

⁹ English Poetry in the Sixteenth Century, 76.

different kinds of desire. From its birth, the sonnet was as directly linked to political power as it was to the expression of the dynamics of love. It was invented by Giacomo da Lentino, who wrote during the secular and culturally diverse empire of the Hohenstaufen Emperor Frederick II of Sicily which lasted from 1208 to 1250.¹⁰ “Power and command of language go together; and central to the command that such administration required was the notion and practice of *eloquentia*, the ‘speaking out’ of the self in texts that were designed to persuade, control, stabilise power and enhance authority.”¹¹ So the sonnet form was already over a hundred years old when Petrarch began using it. And, when the Petrarchan sonnet was imported into England by Wyatt almost two centuries later, it was in a similar political and courtly context: Wyatt wrote at the court of Henry VIII, “a cultured but ruthless sovereign,” and Wyatt was “a courtier academically trained for royal service... offering a persona locating itself just under the level of political explicitness.”¹²

Baldesar Castiglione’s The Book of the Courtier, translated in England in 1561,¹³ became extremely popular as a handbook for Renaissance courtly behaviour. The reason for the popularity of a text theorising correct conduct for the courtier, suggests Kelly-Gadol, is that power was being centralised all across Europe. The nobility in several countries were thus in the similar political position of having to cope with disempowerment as monarchs dismantled feudalism while maintaining an aristocratic court. Castiglione’s designation of the rules of love reflected his sense of the new political rules (thus once again establishing a connection between the Petrarchan sonnet’s expression of love, and politics)¹⁴:

The soul in its earthly prison, the courtier in his social one, renounce the power of self-determination that has in fact been denied them. They denounce *wanting* such power... In love, as in service, the courtier preserves independence by avoiding desire for real love, real power... He may gaze at the object of his love-service, he may listen, but there he reaches the limits of the actual physical relation and transforms her beauty, or the prince’s power, into a pure idea.¹⁵

¹⁰ The Development of the Sonnet, 12.

¹¹ The Development of the Sonnet, 14.

¹² The Development of the Sonnet, 84.

¹³ Oppositional Voices, 14.

¹⁴ Although Dubrow warns that the political nature of Petrarchanism “has been taken too far” (Echoes of Desire, 40), and points out that to read Petrarchanism as only political in nature silences the beloved twice - once within the discourse itself, and again in the erasure of the actual romance - I would like my definition of Petrarchanism to encompass the expression of *both* erotic and political desire.

¹⁵ Becoming Visible, 192-4.

However, while the courtier may renounce the desire for “real” power, Castiglione tries to re-empower the courtier by allowing him influence with the prince: “[T]he end of the perfect courtier, is, by means of the accomplishments attributed to him... to win for himself the mind and favour of the prince he serves.”¹⁶ The courtier becomes a kind of combined nanny and tutor, entertaining and subtly educating at the same time, “practising a healthy deception like a shrewd doctor who often spreads some sweet liquid on the rim of the cup when he wants a frail and sickly child to take a bitter medicine.”¹⁷ So the ideal courtier’s social skill and inherent goodness have the potential to make him the power behind the throne, influencing the prince to the ways of justice, reason and truth. The perfect courtier is symbolised by Phoenix, and although Castiglione’s signor Ottaviano is ostensibly referring to Achilles’ tutor, it is a significant metaphor. The courtier Castiglione is trying to create is a man rising from the ashes of feudalism to become gloriously reborn in the courts of the absolute Renaissance monarchs. However, this courtier is always at the mercy of his ruler, and there is danger for the courtier who does not know how to be careful. To tell “the naked truth, unalloyed by courtiership” is to risk ending up like Callisthenes, whom Alexander the Great executed for his outspoken tendencies.¹⁸ So the courtier has to create a relationship with his prince that is like the relationship of a lover to a beloved:

I know that to talk of a courtier being conversant with his prince in this way implies a certain equality that can hardly exist between a ruler and his servant... Well then, I want the courtier... to devote all his thoughts and strength to loving and almost adoring the prince he serves above all else, devoting all his ambitions, actions and behaviour to pleasing him.¹⁹

The courtier thus speaks a language of love that is directly linked to a language of political power, since to love and serve the prince is to exert a moral-political influence over him. In his need to subjugate himself to the prince’s superior power, the courtier is feminised.

Valeria Finucci, in *The Lady Vanishes*, suggests that this feminisation is the reason for Castiglione’s desire to define the perfect Court Lady as well as the perfect

¹⁶ Baldesar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, tr. George Bull (London: Penguin, 1976), 284.

¹⁷ *The Book of the Courtier*, 289.

¹⁸ *The Book of the Courtier*, 320-1.

¹⁹ *The Book of the Courtier*, 125.

courtier. The whole of Book Three of The Courtier is dedicated to excusing the praise of women, as well as to defining the ideal court lady. Finucci suggests that the male speakers have to define the ideal court lady so as to be able to recognise themselves as different from her, and so reclaim the masculine space they have lost in being courtiers subject to a prince's power. Just as a courtier is dependent on a prince, so he creates a codified notion of a courtly woman who is dependent on the courtier.²⁰ The perfect courtier's identity is closely tied up with the idea of a female identity he can create and off which he can define himself.

Thus the roots of many of the ideological workings of Petrarchanism can be seen growing out of not only Petrarch's poetry, but out of the political and social changes that characterised the climate within which men were speaking. The Book of the Courtier is very concerned with the appropriate ways to fall, and behave, in love. The narcissism implicit in the attention to the courtier's ability to *seem* to be all that he should be, is clear in the book's awareness of "that universal regard which everyone covets,"²¹ as well as Castiglione's Bembo's long monologue on Neoplatonic love. In Book Four, Bembo goes into a kind of rapturous, internal trance as he describes the holy plane to which Platonic love can elevate the courtier. The woman, the original source of such feeling, is not a factor in the courtier's relationship with Goodness which she enables.²² The link that exists between expressing love and expressing issues of political power, the stress on self-involvement, -interest and, -determination, and the notion of a transcendent Idea can all be traced out of concerns in The Book of the Courtier.

The implications for the role women played in this new poetics is clear.

Castiglione

allegorized love... , using the relation of the sexes to symbolize the new political order. In this, his love theory reflects the social realities of the Renaissance. The denial of the right and power of the woman to love [at the end of *The Courtier* he is unsure as to 'whether or not women are as capable of divine love as men'], the transformation of women into passive 'others' who serve, fits the self-image of the courtier, the one Castiglione sought to remedy.²³

²⁰ The Lady Vanishes: Subjectivity and Representation in Castiglione and Ariosto (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 43-4.

²¹ The Book of the Courtier, 63

²² I am indebted to Finucci for this idea: "Bembo's Neoplatonic ladder of love leads the courtier towards God as the final destination of a longed-for, upward journey towards the satisfaction of his desires... [This journey] predicates woman's exclusion" (The Lady Vanishes, 70).

²³ Becoming Visible, 196.

So the need to empower, or re-empower the male self off a notion of female subjectivity created for this purpose can be noted in the standard textbook for courtiers, many of whom were writing the kind of poetry that helped transform Petrarch into Petrarchanism, in Fineman's phrase, in England in the sixteenth century.

Marotti points out that the language of Petrarchan love was very convenient to a female prince. Elizabeth's unmarried status was conducive to propagating a language of idealised and idealising desire. Indeed, Marotti says that she "specifically encouraged the use of an amorous vocabulary by her courtiers to express ambition and its vicissitudes," and cites as an example a letter from Sir Christopher Hatten. Concerned about losing the Queen's favour due to an enforced absence at court, he expresses his anxiety in the extreme language of the Petrarchan lover, transforming "ambition and envy" into the "socially more acceptable" "'hope' and 'jealousy.'" ²⁴ Thus the position of female beloved was used by Elizabeth to her own advantage, even as it forced her to occupy a particularly tenuous position of power which could only be maintained by denying her sexuality, compelling her to maintain her myth as Ideal by remaining publicly the pure, Virgin Queen.

The notion of the Ideal female beloved as a source of both erotic and political power, was an important one in the early modern period. Talking of the development of Renaissance philosophies of love, Spiller gives the example of Bembo's *Gli Asolani* (*The Meeting at Asolo*), "a series of dialogues on the nature of love." In this, the myth of the Queen of the Fortunate Isles is developed by Bembo to illustrate

the type of the Renaissance princess, ruling over a community of men... in a palace/garden of ideal beauty, entry into which is conditional upon the possession of a noble soul, steady devotion and eloquent witness of it [the men in love with the Queen are put into a magical sleep and required to *write* down their dreams upon waking. They are judged according to what they dreamed]... In the tradition of the Wise Woman... the female ruler represents the union of Truth, Power and Beauty: truth to search the hidden thoughts of men, power to judge their deeds and order their actions in accordance with truth, and beauty to compel their acceptance of her truth and power. [This is linked to the] practical reality that a Renaissance court was a place of seeking, displaying, testing and rewarding... locked into a myth of truth, expressed in poetry as worship of a beloved enchantress, whose power derives from some transcendent source and is exhibited through her beauty. ²⁵

²⁴ " 'Love is not Love,' " 398-9.

²⁵ *The Development of the Sonnet*, 74-6.

The direct parallels between the Queen of the Fortunate Isles and Queen Elizabeth's cult of power are obvious, as are the expressions of power through love; he who speaks his love the best will receive the Queen's attention and be allowed into her court, the locus of political power and therefore the site of achieving a certain kind of virility. Thus "Petrarchan love becomes a master analogy for all desire,"²⁶ and "Courtly and Petrarchan love metaphors became... the accepted language for begging political favours."²⁷ In this sense, then, the position of the addressee of Petrarchan love poetry could be enormously powerful. However, the love expressed in this discourse of desires has ultimately the lover's own interests at heart. Furthermore, the ideal position spoken for the beloved relies on her purity. The nobility, ideal Goodness and spirituality that the discourse assumes the beloved will provide needs a chaste female to describe in the first place, since chastity was the sum total of female virtue (as is made clear in The Book of the Courtier, where "every kind of vice" in women is expressed through their being "lascivious and shameless"²⁸). Had Elizabeth broken her "Virgin Queen" myth and publicly engaged in the erotic activities suggested by the language used to address her, the idealising language of Petrarchan love might not have seemed so appropriate, and would certainly not have been expressed so seriously, so unironically.

Not all men took kindly to this discourse, objecting to its nature as praise-poetry, and to the formulaic qualities that enabled Petrarchan language to be easily reproduced by anyone seeking courtly prestige. In the writer quoted below, the problem is seen to lie with the misrepresentation of female beauty. There is no objection to the principle of describing women as blazoned objects. Rather, this writer abhors the dishonesty in Petrarchan representation because he perceives it as misleading to other men:

The poets of our age... extol their whores, which they call mistresses, with heavenly praises... Many that would seem serious, have dedicated grave works to ladies toothless, hollow eyed, their hair shedding, purplefaced, their nails apparently coming off; and the bridges of their noses broken down; and have

²⁶ The Development of the Sonnet, 126.

²⁷ English Poetry of the Sixteenth Century, 26-7.

²⁸ The Book of the Courtier, 109.

called them the choice handiworks of nature, the patterns of perfection, and the wonderment of women."²⁹

This marks a recognition of the sexual, as opposed to political or psychological, elements of Petrarchanism. Important in terms of the tradition's lack of female reciprocity, as well as in the context of the socio-sexual climate of the Renaissance, is the fact that the commentator cannot conceive of a sexually reciprocal woman except as a "whore," and objects to the construction of the Petrarchan ideal not for its oppressive qualities but for its unrealistic ones, offering instead an equal blazon of grotesqueries for the 'real' mistresses. There is an added irony to this elaborate and disgusting depiction of the true recipient of the Petrarchan sonnet, considering that at the height of its popularity it was offered as flattery to an ageing queen whose mystique relied upon the notion of her as "the wonderment of women" even as her body reflected the realities of time: toothless, hollow eyed, and all the rest, although one hopes, for Elizabeth's dignity, that she was not as graphically old as the hag that the writer of this piece presents.

That real female reciprocity had no part in the Renaissance tradition can be seen in the sonnet's development even before it reached England. In *Vita Nuova*, written about a generation before Petrarch, Dante "confesses that the joy he once took in his beloved's greeting he shall henceforth seek in himself, 'in words which praise my lady.' " In the fact that "It is the inner life, *his* inner life," that Dante is interested in expressing through praise of his lady, we can see the movement towards the linguistic self-reflexion that characterises the Renaissance Petrarchan sonnet.³⁰ Because Petrarchan language is so concerned with the desires of the speaker, it is strongly narcissistic, voicing the lover's need to find, through the beloved, an ideal self. This ideal Petrarchan self is a possibility always about to be achieved through possession of the beloved, which would mark an ideal unity of subject (lover) and object (beloved). But the desired object can never be attained, because this would signal an end to the writing. The pleasure of Petrarchanism is the pleasure of pursuit, "the pleasure of feeling oneself always about to be completed."³¹

²⁹ Qtd. Linda Woodbridge, "Black and White and Red All Over," in *Renaissance Quarterly* 40 (1987), 292.

³⁰ "Did Women Have a Renaissance?," 189.

³¹ Marguerite Waller, "The Empire's New Clothes: Refashioning the Renaissance," in *Seeking the Woman*, 175.

Fineman details how the lover, in describing his beloved, is in fact identifying with, and thus unifying, subject with object: "the lady attracts the lover to herself and thereby brings the lover to himself."³² English Petrarchan poetry is predominantly concerned with the constitution of male selves, the expression of male desire for political as well as sexual power. Male interaction, homotextual (the term is Janet Halley's³³) display, is facilitated by the element of Petrarchan poetry that revels in the ability to exhibit both the mistress and the virtuosity of language-use that at once describes the beloved and defines the male self: as Shakespeare says, "'tis thee (myself) that for myself I praise" (sonnet 62), and, in an example suggested by Fineman, the "reflexively reflective epideictic structure" of Renaissance praise poetry is seen "ridiculously" in sonnet 35 of *Astrophil and Stella*: "Not thou by praise, but praise in thee is raisde:/ It is a praise to praise, when thou art praisde."³⁴

An example of an English Petrarchan mistress, and the way she is constructed by the text, can be seen in perhaps *the* English Petrarchan mistress, Sidney's Stella. Sidney's extremely popular cycle is significant to a discussion of Wroth, because her sequence does display its influence. Also important, however, is the fact that men writing within traditions they have inherited, even in a mocking or self-reflexive way, still occupy the same position within the poetic discourse. "The logic of their dissection of other poets lies precisely in the fact that they themselves are speaking from the same position, only better - so more deservingly. Women poets, however write from a position outside the convention altogether, from a new and marginal space that calls into question the polarities implicit in such poetry."³⁵ It is precisely this fact that legitimises discussing differences in Petrarchanism caused by a female poetic subjectivity, even though the term 'female subjectivity' is indeterminate in itself. When a woman speaks for the first time within a tradition designed by and for male subjects, who create specific notions of 'femaleness' that are intrinsic to their discourses, certain implications arise. I hope to elucidate some of these implications of gender for English Petrarchanism by looking at what happens when Pamphilia speaks Petrarchan poetry as the first English female poetic subject, and comparing

³² *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye*, 18.

³³ In "Textual Intercourse: Anne Donne, John Donne, and the Sexual Politics of Textual Exchange" in *Seeking the Woman*.

³⁴ *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye*, 191.

³⁵ "Assimilation with a Difference," 136.

Pamphilia's responses to Astrophil's. There are fundamental differences in the way Wroth uses aspects of the Petrarchan tradition, caused by fact that a woman is speaking the language of a traditionally masculinist discourse. "To speak as a woman" in Petrarchan discourse "is to contradict the role [it] assign[s] to women: the opaque target of the masculine gaze, of male desire, of male praise and persuasion. By virtue of their sex early women poets challenged the rhetorical and symbolic order on which love poetry was based."³⁶

In the first sonnet of Astrophil and Stella, which both signals the fact that Sidney is writing a Petrarchan sonnet-cycle, and makes claims for Astrophil's desire to be sincere, it becomes clear that he both is and is not a 'typical' Petrarchan lover. Indeed, despite his scorn for the codified language of the tradition, "Petrarchan language comes to" Astrophil "as part of an inherited way of dealing with or projecting experience." His character is "created for us in terms of... the degree to which [he] accept[s] or resist[s] it [Petrarchan language] as a way of describing experience."³⁷ Astrophil refers to the Petrarchan tradition he has inherited and marks it as insufficient to express his 'true' praise of Stella:

I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe,
Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertaine:
Oft turning others leaves, to see if thence would flow
Some fresh and fruitfull showers upon my sunn-burn'd braine.
But words came halting forth, wanting Inventions stay...
And others feete still seem'd but strangers in my way³⁸

This sonnet ends with an invocation from Astrophil's "Muse" to "look in thy heart and write." The image of the mistress traditionally resided in the heart of the poet-lover,³⁹ as source of both love and inspiration. Here, Astrophil assumes this traditional formulation and in doing so claims his difference, by opposing what is truly in his heart - Stella - to the "inventions fine" of "others leaves." Nevertheless, by positing Stella as the means of his inspiration, as he frequently does, not only here but in the course of the cycle (for example, "... in Stellas face I reed,/ What Love and Beautie be, then all my deed/ But Copying is, what her Nature writes" [sonnet 3]), Astrophil

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ David Kalstone, Sidney's Poetry: Contexts and Interpretations (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 108.

³⁸ All quotes from Astrophil and Stella are from The Anchor Anthology of Sixteenth Century Verse ed. Richard Sylvester (Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1983).

³⁹ Sidney's Poetry, 126.

neatly signals one of the actual functions of the woman/beloved in Petrarchan discourses. The female figure is a source from which and upon which invention can work. Although the poetry is ostensibly “about” her and the love she causes her poet to feel, she is not actually the subject of the poetry as much as the cause of the poetry, which is far more ‘about’ the poet’s own internal processes. The text is thus in some ways ‘about’ the poet-lover’s emotional response to his mistress.

In certain of the songs of *Astrophil and Stella*, Stella seems to be given her own voice. However, she is not so straightforwardly represented, because she speaks words put in her mouth by the Petrarchan tradition. It is significant that it is only in the songs that Stella’s voice is even constructed, which would imply that the Petrarchan sonnet was so full of the poet’s self that there was no space for a female voice even to be facilitated within the actual body of the sonnet. It would seem that, by the time Sidney wrote, adapting Petrarchanism as he had inherited it, any reciprocal action of plot or word was excluded from the Petrarchan sonnet itself, and displaced into the songs. When Stella does speak, it is the language of traditional denial. She does, however, offer an interesting insight into why the English Petrarchan mistress could not speak a language of reciprocity. When Stella speaks, after Astrophil’s declaration of love and an appeal for a physical consummation, “**Astrophil** sayd she, my love/ Cease in these effects to prove/ Now be still” (Eighth Song). This is exactly what one would expect a Petrarchan mistress to be able to say. However, Stella qualifies her denial. “Trust me while I thee deny,” she says, “Tyran honour doth thus use thee,/ *Stellas* selfe might not refuse thee.” It is not only the realities of the Petrarchan tradition, but the realities of Renaissance gender politics, that make it impossible for Stella to submit to her poet’s demands. Whatever “*Stellas selfe*” might actually want, if she is to keep her honour, she is bound to remain chaste. So although she is given a voice, which is unusual for the women who are worshipped and objectified in Petrarchan verse, she must nevertheless speak lines of purity and denial. Castiglione’s Signor Magnifico acknowledges that “men can display their affection with far less risk than women.”⁴⁰ This is why he advises that women only fall in love with men they can marry. Stella, already married to the “Rich foole” of sonnet 24, has to fulfil a set gender role if she is to keep her social prestige, and thus must occupy an expected Petrarchan gender role, which Astrophil, despite being in many ways the Petrarchan lover-poet, manages to avoid.

⁴⁰ *The Book of the Courtier*, 260.

It was precisely because she refused physical consummation that the Petrarchan mistress could embody the notion of ideal object whose outer beauty reflected her inner perfection of spirit. That the transcendent qualities of the Petrarchan mistress, the beloved who “embodies a general truth,” were carried through into the English tradition, and indeed, popularised beyond the poetic discourse itself, can be seen in the writing of John Ford, poet and dramatist of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries:

Being overcome with the affection of some excellently deserving beauty, with admiration of the singular perfection thereof, with what curious workmanship it is framed, with what glorie of majesty it is endowed, it is an immediate occasion, to bring [male observers] in serious conceit of weighing the wonders of the heavens in compacting such admirable quintessence in so precious a form, by which they will deeply resolve the dignity of God in that mould, and truly acknowledge the weaknesse of their owne nature in comparison of beauty.⁴¹

Just as a woman, an “excellently deserving beauty” who must be not only physically attractive but sexually chaste if she is to be “excellently deserving,” is the cause for male observers to enjoy a spiritual experience, so the Petrarchan mistress is the cause for the poet’s self-knowledge, as she is an ideal object that facilitates the poet’s narcissistic fulfillment. As such, woman is not only object, but passive, undesiring object. To be sexually (or, for that matter, publicly vocally) reciprocal is to not fit the mold of ideal Renaissance woman.

Within the context, then, of the discourse of power and domination underlying the language of love that Petrarchanism makes available for its male lovers,⁴² Wroth’s Petrarchan sonnet cycle, Pamphilia to Amphilanthus makes significant comments upon, and changes to, the tradition in which it wants to place itself.

Perhaps the most immediately striking feature of Wroth’s sequence is the fact that Pamphilia to Amphilanthus is a Petrarchan sonnet-cycle, where the poet, who by definition in Petrarchanism had always been male, is in this case a woman. In a

⁴¹ Sarah J. Eaton, “Presentations of Women in the English Popular Press” in Ambiguous Realities, 172, interpolation hers.

⁴² However, Dubrow warns against a simplistic reading of this fact, saying “that to read Petrarchanism primarily as an exercise in domination and silencing is to misread it” (Echoes of Desire, 12). Indeed, to read what I am saying as advocating the interpretation against which Dubrow is objecting, is to misread *me*. Rather, the domination and silencing are the results of a certain kind of complex (political, psychological and erotic) desire emanating from a certain kind of speaking subject, expressed in a certain way, at a certain time.

correlation of writer and persona that reflects the political facet of Petrarchanism, Jones sees Pamphilia to Amphilanthus as reflecting very real social and political issues for Wroth:

Wroth was a fallen courtier when her romance was published in 1621... Wroth makes Pamphilia's situation as unrequited lover the subject of laments that were strategic attempts to rewrite her disgrace and put an end to her exclusion from court society... Wroth's dramas of torment are not acts of self-punishment for her transgression of sexual codes; rather these self-exposures position Pamphilia as a martyr in order to put her tormentors in the wrong.⁴³

That the whole cycle may be read as a means for Wroth's re-empowerment within the oppressive Jacobean court becomes ironic when the nature of her persona, Pamphilia's, Petrarchanism is explicated. The facts of Wroth's life would seem to suggest that the woman could cope well with the constraints of her milieu, finding ways around gender prohibitions, if only temporarily in the public sphere. However, Pamphilia does not seem to be able to meld her identity as a woman with her desire to be a Petrarchan lover. Pamphilia's name means "all loving" and her beloved, Amphilanthus, is a "lover of two." This is very different from the more conventional Astrophil, the "star lover" and his celestial and therefore unreachable Stella. Philip Sidney is accredited with fully Anglicising Petrarchanism, injecting what had become weak copies of "poor Petrarch's long deceased woes" with energy and sincerity via his impatient and impassioned Astrophil. However, as the titles of the two sonnet cycles suggest, Pamphilia confronts far more than the typically aloof beloved, or the frustrations of unfulfillable desire; she has to contend with betrayal. I would suggest that the new dimension to stylized Petrarchan pain found in her sonnets has to do with this element of betrayal. Not only is Pamphilia betrayed by an inconstant lover, she is also betrayed by the very form in which she attempts to write, Petrarchanism. Referring to the typical use of oxymorons in the convention, she displays her awareness of its construction. She says,

In coldest hopes I freeze, yett burne Ay mee...
 From grieffe I haste but sorrows hy,
 And on my hart all woes doe ly Ay mee.
 From contraries I seeke to runn Ay mee
 But contraries I can nott shunn, Ay mee (Song 2 [P14] ll.5-10)⁴⁴

⁴³ "Designing Women," 137-147.

⁴⁴ All Wroth's poems cited are from Roberts, The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth, including her marking of the sonnets in the sequence as a whole as P1-103.

The repetition of the mourning-cry “Ay mee” encapsulates her dilemma - she cannot escape the fundamentals of Petrarchanism, a discourse in which Dale Spender locates the “male-as-norm” syndrome, where male experience is posited as the only legitimate means of encountering the wor(l)d.⁴⁵ Traditional Petrarchanism, by its very nature, requires a silent, placed, and written-upon woman in order to exist. Were Laura or Stella ever to become vocal, willing, or fleshly, their suffering scribes could no longer complain of their aloofness or praise their ideal beauty and purity. As Gilbert and Gubar put it, the mistress of the sonnet tradition “can never herself be a poet because she ‘is’ poetry.”⁴⁶

Nona Fienberg conceives of Pamphilia’s attempt to create rather than ‘be’ poetry in very empowering terms. Of Song 2, quoted above, she says that by extending “the ballad’s four-line stanzas... by an additional foot, with her ‘Ay mee’ refrain,” Wroth

invents an exploded ballad form... Wroth’s challenge to the ballad form, disrupting it by the bold repetition of the refrain, asserts a new, unashamed voice, ready to retell the story of Petrarchanism.⁴⁷

However, I do not believe that there is so triumphant a tone to Wroth’s Petrarchanism. On the contrary, Wroth is the first female poet to try to reclaim the language of English Petrarchanism, and this has a disturbing effect on her writing self.⁴⁸ That she is actively engaged in appropriating a tradition is clear in the first sonnet of the cycle. Lying asleep, in “Death’s image” (1.2), Pamphilia dreams of Venus and Cupid:

... one heart flaming more then all the rest
The goddess held, and putt itt to my brest,

⁴⁵ Man Made Language (London: Pandora, 1990), 2.

⁴⁶ Qtd. Jan Montefiore, Feminism and Poetry (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 1994), 29.

⁴⁷ Nona Fienberg, “Mary Wroth and the Invention of Female Poetic Subjectivity” in Reading Mary Wroth, 186.

⁴⁸ Indeed, the critical reception of Wroth’s work, a broad example of which can be found in Waller and Miller’s Reading Mary Wroth, in the essays by Jeff Masten, Ann Rosalind Jones, Nona Fienberg and Gary Waller, for example, characterise Wroth as triumphantly creating an emerging female private space, voice, discourse. Of course, the fact she transgressed prohibitive social codes and wrote a political, courtly account of love when only religious and domestic topics were considered appropriate for women, is indeed a triumph. But we should not confuse this personal artistic success with textual effects. The fact that Pamphilia struggles to be accommodated in a previously all-male discourse can be partially accounted for by the fact that there were very few, and no public, role models for women writers at the time, and they had to work with what they had, creating their own rules as they went along or trying to get around social proscriptions laid on their sex (see chapter two).

Deare sonne, now shutt sayd she...
 Hee her obay'd, and martir'd my poore hart,
 I, waking, hop'd as dreams itt would depart
 Yett since: O mee, a lover I have binn. (ll.9-14)

The insertion of "a Petrarchan burning heart into [Pamphilia's] breast authoriz[es] her position as a Petrarchan speaker."⁴⁹ Also, that Pamphilia invokes the idea of the image and the dream, both of which are, like the Petrarchan formula, removed from 'reality,' together with the traditional method of branding the archetypal lover, illustrate her self-conscious expression of the fact that she will be using a convention. However, by the double usage of such deferring devices, by supplanting the acquisition of her lover-status in a dream within an image within a poem, she creates a distance between herself and the feelings she is trying to evoke. In other words, right from the inception of her sonnet-cycle, the tradition of Petrarchanism becomes an inadequate, deferred expression of Pamphilia's experience as a lover. This inadequacy can also be seen in Pamphilia's use of many of the traditional devices of the Petrarchan convention.

In Petrarch's love poetry... the male poetic corpus is substantiated at the cost of the dismemberment of Laura. As Thomas Greene argues... '[F]or males at any rate the habit of transforming the object of desire, and especially her body, into a symbol seems virtually irresistible'. To Greene's speculation that the love poetry of a female poet might escape this process, Wroth's poetry provides one clear answer: no blazons scattering the parts of her beloved, no fetishizing of a veil, a foot, an eyebrow, and thus no self-creation out of the scattered parts of the beloved.⁵⁰

Instead, I would suggest, Pamphilia engages in a kind of self-scattering. Similarly, that she does not create herself out of the parts of her beloved can be accounted for partly by Amphilanthus's linguistic absence in the poetry, which in itself is another reason that Pamphilia cannot replicate the self-constitutional strategies of Petrarchan poetry, and why she has only herself off which to bounce any reflections she sees. Astrophil's poems are either addressed to, straightforwardly about, or play on the name of, Stella. His poetry is a plenitude of her 'presence.' Pamphilia's poetry embodies a world of absence, of lonely self, and of absent self, and comprises many metaphysical presences to which she addresses herself. In a very real sense then, as she implies through her marriage image in P10 ("Sorrow I'le wed: Dispaire thus governs mee" [l.14]), that

⁴⁹ Jeff Masten, "'Shall I turne blabb?': Circulation, Gender, and Subjectivity In Mary Wroth's Sonnets" in *Reading Mary Wroth*, 70.

⁵⁰ "Mary Wroth and the Invention of Female Poetic Subjectivity," 177.

these abstractions are her primary companions. A few examples are: sonnets P4, P17, P22 and P43 are addressed to Night; Sorrow is the subject of Song 7 (P49) and Sleep of P18. Abstractions are personified in many of the sonnets: grief and scorn (P6 and P32), shades (P19), harms and joys (P10 and P33), endless torments (P12), tedious, “faulce” Hope (P31 and P40), time (Song 5 [P35] and P37). In later sonnets, many mythological beings make an appearance: “Sweet Silvia.../With her faire Nymphs” (P92), “Philomeale” (P93), Juno and Jove (P97), the former with whom Pamphilia has a conversation. There is also, of course, Love in his different incarnations (who is the primary site of interaction between Pamphilia’s private world and the public pressures she so despises, as will be discussed in chapter six).

The Petrarchan impulse to categorise its women in a way that reduces them to a list of body parts is satirised by Shakespeare in his sonnet 130, although for different reasons. “My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun,” he begins, going through what the parts of her body (lips, breasts, hair, breath, voice, feet) are not like. Pamphilia, too, displays an awareness of the convention’s constant desire to break her down because she is a woman. She seems to pre-empt it by separating herself from her body, almost as if her entry into Petrarchanism necessitates such an action. One example, to follow Shakespeare’s lead, can be found in the many sonnets addressed by Pamphilia, not to her beloved’s, but to her own eyes: “Poore eyes bee blind.../ Send forth your teares” (P29 ll. 1-7), she says, and “Take heed mine eyes, how you your lookes doe cast” (P39 l. 1). In Song 3 (P21), a radical fragmentation of self can be found:

Stay, my thoughts, do nott aspire
To vaine hopes of high desire:
See you nott all means bereft
To injoye? Noe joy is left;
Yett still mee thinks my thoughts doe say
Some hopes do live amid dismay;...
Thought hath yett some comfort giv’ne
Which dispaire hath from us drivn;
Therefor deerly my thoughts cherish
Never lett such thinking perish (ll. 1-12)

Pamphilia separates herself from her thoughts, in many ways a more drastic move than separating herself from her body, because the fragmentation exists not externally, but psychically. The fragmentation typical of the Petrarchan lady is internalised, and

Pamphilia indicates that her Self, her /I/, is split, when she uses the plural personal pronoun, indicating that within the Song she is comprised of both her self, and her self separate from her thoughts, a kind of dual vision of personal subjectivity: “dispaire hath [comfort] from *us* drivn”, she says. She also omits the use of the personal pronoun altogether, thus addressing advice to herself as though she were speaking to another person: “Therefor deerly my thoughts cherish”. The Petrarchan *blazon*, that dismembers its women’s bodies symbolically, here extends its force into a woman’s psyche, significantly precisely when a woman enters the tradition as a poet, as a vocal subject.

Similarly, Pamphilia utilises the trope of the lover’s lost heart in a way that betrays her anxiety, especially considering the implications of Amphilanthus’s name. She says to him,

In your journey take my hart...
 Soe in part, wee shall nott part...
 Butt can I live having lost
 Chieftest part of mee...
 Yett deere hart goe, soone returne
 As good there, as heere to burne. (Song 4 [P28])

Pamphilia clearly indicates there is no escape from her pain, regardless of whether or not her dearheart is nearby with her dear heart: “As good there, as heere to burne.” As he exists primarily as a “lover of two,” he is neither a sage repository for her loving heart, nor likely to “soone returne” with his precious gift. In psychoanalytic terms, “ ‘Female sexuality has always been theorised within masculine parameters’ which posits women as the site of a lack - she who does not possess the phallus which is the symbol of virility, activity and sexual potency.”⁵¹ In attempting to pick up the phallus/pen, Pamphilia cannot escape the fact that Petrarchanism forces her into these parameters, and thus she has to cope with the lack which she understands as being caused by the giving away of her heart, itself a typical Petrarchan trope. Thus having engaged in the activity of giving away the “chieftest part” of any lover’s self, she goes on to predicate a fundamental absence which can only be filled by her beloved’s organ:

⁵¹ Irigaray qtd. Kadiatu Kanneh, “Love, Mourning and Metaphor: terms of identity” in *New Feminist Discourses*, 137. This must impact on the fact that Pamphilia ultimately chooses constancy and by implication, chastity, and it is with this decision that her sonnet-cycle ends, and has to end.

Butt if you will bee kind...
 Send mee your hart which in mines place shall feed...
 Ther shall itt see the sacrificies made
 Of pure, and spotless love which shall not vade
 While soule, and body are together found. (P30 //9-14)

The expression of what may be read as her sexual self as a void, because she conceives of herself as having an empty space inside her (a no-thing, which also ties into dominant theories of socio-sexual difference during the Renaissance), reveals the way in which she undermines herself while buying into the typical Petrarchan convention of the constant lover. In fact, the address to her heart in sonnet P41 functions in a similar way to the apostrophising of her thoughts in Song 3: "How well poore hart thou wittnes canst I love/ How oft my grieve hath made thee shed forth teares/ Drops of thy deerest blood" (//. 1-3). Pamphilia's tears of grief are wept by her heart (her eyes having to hide their grief from other, "watching eyes" [P39 l.5]), which is a separate entity to her self, and is in fact not part of her, having been given away. Thus the self-blazon continues. As Pamphilia herself says, "The knowing part of joye is deem'd the hart;/ If that bee gon, what joy can joy impart/ When senceless is the feeler of our mirthe" (P44 //9-11).

There are further consequences for Pamphilia's conception of her heart and its displacement. The image of her lover's voracious heart feeding inside her breast and voyeuristically viewing her innermost processes, gives a violent, uncomfortable twist to the typical Petrarchan trope of the lost heart. Similarly, that she explicitly emphasises the "pure, and spotless" nature of her love indicates a response to the subconscious sexuality in her need for Amphilanthus's heart which is quick to retreat behind the fundamental Petrarchan female trait, unsullied by intercourse - chastity. The implications of these images can be extended further. By contrasting her beloved's rapacious, gazing (male) heart to her own "pure, and spotless love," Pamphilia withdraws from the reality of the sexual importunity vocalised by, for example, Astrophil, who as a male lover can say, "But ah, Desire still cries, give me some food" (s.71). By insisting on her own chastity, Pamphilia takes on the only stereotype made available to her as a woman within Petrarchanism. She cannot separate the stance of the Petrarchan lover she wishes to be from her sense of herself as a woman in a specific (con)text.

Perhaps the most blatant criticism of the role she is forced to assume as a woman operating within Petrarchanism can be found in sonnet P25, where she compares herself and her own traditionally desirable pale white skin, which she says is indicative of her service to the God Love, to “Indians” burnt black by the sun they worship:

Better are they who thus to blacknes runn,
 And soe can only whitenes want deplore
 Then I who pale, and white ame with griefs store,
 Nor can have hope, butt to see hopes undunne;
 Beesids theyr sacrifices receavd's in sight
 Of their chose sainte: Mine hid as worthles rite. (ll.5-10)

Thus, having set up a dichotomy between desirable whiteness and deplorable blackness, she frames it with the bitter complaint that her sacrifices to her god are unanswered, hidden, and considered worthless whereas the “Indians” are free to display *welcomed* religious gestures (a metaphor which in itself can be read as displaying an awareness of the ritualistic aspect of Petrarchanism). Then Pamphilia requests what for a Renaissance Englishwoman must have been a horrifying boon: “Then lett mee weare the marke of Cupids might” (l.12). She seems to be asking for a sign to be made on her skin, “Like to the Indians, scorched with the sunne.../... they doe as theyr God adore” (ll.1-2). She would thus be marked as a lover and, in being marked - by implication by affecting the unblemished whiteness of her face - would no longer be able to be constituted by Petrarchanism as the traditional beloved. And Pamphilia plays with the subversive nature of this thought by leaving it hanging; she delays the mitigating clause by enjamming a phrase into the following line:

Then lett mee weare the mark...
 In hart as they in skin (ll.12-13)

Pamphilia returns to what has been designated the “chieftest,” the most important part of herself, her heart, and chooses to mark herself there. However, by virtue of her status as a Petrarchan lover, as she has already pointed out, her heart no longer belongs to her. Thus she has no escape. She seems to be saying that “Indians” (who, in a Renaissance context must have invoked the other connotations of “running to blackness”) can be what they are, “scorched” with the attentions of their sun-god, whereas she, who is what she is supposed to be both in terms of what is considered beautiful for a beloved and appropriate for a Petrarchan lover, that is, “pale and

white... with griefs store," cannot be accommodated. Everything I have been given, Pamphilia is suggesting, is inadequate to my expression of my Self. This must be a comment on the strictures of Petrarchanism on a speaking, desiring woman.

Thus there is a radical destabilisation of her self as a poet that is quite foreign to her male counterparts. "[A]ll good Petrarchans rage, despair and amuse in their failure to make language embody truth. The Petrarchan poet tries and fails to create the presence of the beloved in language."⁵² Wroth's poetry does not even try to create the beloved's presence through its language. The poetry is not 'about' the poet-lover's narcissistic fulfillment via the perfect beloved described as a character in the text, but about Pamphilia's self-created absence, about her struggle with her lover-status. Petrarchan poets may be traditionally concerned with the insecurity of language, and may be reaching towards that which they will never achieve, and may have a sense of subjectivity which is always in flux, but Shakespeare's poet can still be sure of his poetry that, "So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,/ So long lives this" (s. 18). And Astrophil, displaying an awareness of his own construction as a lover, can write a 108 sonnet-long narrative, so that he can say to Stella, "I am not I, pitie the tale of me" (s. 45), with a cheeky confidence that works as a joke and as a metatextual comment. On the other hand, Pamphilia calls the "pleasure" gained from her beloved "shadow-like" (P24 l. 12). Her conception of the worth of her Petrarchan poetry is as uncertain as her position within Petrarchanism. In P45 she says,

... silently I beare my greatest loss...
Nor can I as those pleasant witts injoy
My own fram'd words, which I account the dross
Of purer thoughts. (ll. 3-7)

So her poetry is reduced to the stuff of the dream with which she began, the imperfect images or reflections of "purer thoughts." This is almost a direct inversion of the 'typical' poetry of Petrarchanism. Male poets writing within this particular thread of the tradition have their words to lead them towards the Ideal. However, Pamphilia sees her words as the poor leftovers of the Neoplatonic Idea. In other words, the Idea that the beloved traditionally represents is a path to higher, 'purer' notions. For Pamphilia, however, her words work inversely to this norm; they do not lead her to the plane of the Ideal, they remind her she has been there and cannot ever truly

⁵² English Poetry of the Sixteenth Century, 249-50.

express it. The stated unconfidence in one's ability adequately to convey one's feelings is not new to Petrarchanism, but I think this expression of it is. Pamphilia radically undermines her words, not through clever manipulations of meaning, not through battling with the notion of sincerity through praise, but directly and overtly, as signifiers. The words become inadequate signifiers of a higher reality. Similarly, Pamphilia undermines her self, which is, after all, composed solely of words. This leaves her in silence and incomprehensibility - in an absence of meaning and of self.

"Absence and loss" are the "primary subjects" of Petrarchan poetry, "as the lover seeks to recover what he imagines into being precisely *as* loss, and, on the level of the signifier, the poem strives to materialize an object which always escapes."⁵³ The mistress is always object not subject, except as a reflection of the poet's subjectivity. Absence and loss, as typical Petrarchan motifs, are central to Wroth's poetry, but in a way that highlights the absence not only of the ideal self which can be achieved through the desired object, but of the speaker from herself, since the desired object within Petrarchan discourse is also the speaker in sonnets written by a woman.

Absence occurs often enough to be a character in Pamphilia's poetry.

"Absence more sad, more bitter then is gall/ Or death" (P33), which is a typical element in Petrarchan poetry, changes its quality when spoken by a women poet. This is because absence does not function to mark the absence of the Ideal within the poet and therefore express the poet's desire for union with the beloved, but instead becomes a presence in itself, and the constituting factor of self - in the absence of Pamphilia's ability to reach beyond herself, to break the circular motion of identity-formation in which she is caught, absence becomes the locus around which she circulates. It is taken out of the 'external' places usually occupied by the beloved and to which the poet traditionally gestures, and is moved inward, like many of the Petrarchan devices Pamphilia uses. There is no sense of Petrarchan pleasure in a self always about to be filled; rather, there is the sense that the self will never be filled: "The missing of the sunn awhile makes night/ Butt absence of my joy sees never Light" (P23 ll.13-14). There is no expectation of the Sun of her joy returning to her in the form of anticipated union with the beloved. Rather, unlike the temporary absence of light during darkness, Pamphilia will "never" fill her absence with her Ideal Light.

⁵³ English Poetry of the Sixteenth Century, 230.

Therefore, "Darknes doth truly sute with mee oprest/ Whom absence power doth from mirthe controle," and, "If trees and leaves [in winter] for absence, mourners bee/ Noe marvaile that I grieve, who like want see" (P22, ll.3-4 and 13-14). The natural imagery - day and night, winter and its effects on trees - gives a sense of finality to Pamphilia's unfulfillable absence; just as the cycles of hours and years just *are*, so the reality that Pamphilia's absence will never be replete with her beloved just *is*.

In P45, where Pamphilia pleads demonic possession as a reason not to have to speak, she says, "The hellish speritt absence doth arest/ All my poore sences to his cruell might" (ll.12-13). Continuing the theme suggested by "That Divell speach," (l.10), "Pamphilia appropriates the familiar discourse of demonic possession, but, importantly, she is 'possesst' not by some definitive intruding demon... but rather by 'the hellish speritt absence.'" ⁵⁴ That she willingly dissembles demonic possession in an era when women were being burned alive for precisely such a supposed activity ⁵⁵ gives this poem a particularly chilling overtone: what is Pamphilia willing to incur in order to stay silent? And how can a Petrarchan poet, engaged with a public genre, be prepared to sacrifice herself in order *not* to have to speak to those around her? Significantly, therefore, in sonnet P44, Pamphilia becomes "a bannish'd creature" (l.1), she becomes absented herself. By the constant presence of absence in Wroth's poetry, we are returned to the primary absence at the heart of Petrarchanism - the female.

The fundamental absence at the heart, and in the heart, of the speaker of these poems sits uncomfortably, as does Pamphilia herself, with the courtly, public nature of Petrarchanism. This publicity is something of which Petrarchan lovers are well aware. Astrophil defined himself against those myriad poets who "poor *Petrarchs* long deceased woes.../ do sing" (s.15), and although he may be staking his claim as an inventor, as opposed to a slavish imitator with nothing interesting to add to an exhausted tradition, his poetry still rests firmly and confidently on the tradition he derides. Without poor Petrarch's long deceased woes, there would be no Astrophil; and he needs the public awareness of the Petrarchan tradition in order to set himself up as a true lover, not merely a poet utilising a tradition. "I can speake what I feelee,

⁵⁴ "Shall I turne blabb?" 75.

⁵⁵ Cf. "Protestant Wives, Catholic Saints, and the Devil's Handmaid."

and feele as much as they," he says, "But thinke that all the Map of my state I display/ When trembling voice brings forth that I do Stella love" (s.6). Pamphilia says, "Itt is nott love which you poore fooles do deeme/ That doth apeare by fond, and outward showes" (P46 ll. 1-2). Masten locates in Pamphilia's Astrophilean identification of herself as different to other Petrarchan lovers a "foregrounding of a gender difference." Pamphilia, says Masten, "repudiat[es] the rhetorical trappings and metaphorical suites of male Petrarchan discourse."⁵⁶ However, what Masten fails to point out is precisely the fact that it is the typical strategy of the best Petrarchan lovers to identify themselves as being truly in love, and not merely with the poetry they can produce from a Petrarchan situation. After all, poetry of praise that doesn't profess its praise as genuine is no praise at all. Both Astrophil and Shakespeare's Will display this awareness. What is more significant is that Pamphilia's responses to her context display, not an opportunity to enhance her own status as a lover, but a self-imposed deprivation of meaning - another self-created absence. Firstly, she is very aware of a need to be silent in order to protect herself - she has to ensure that she does not "betray my harts most secrett thought" (P39 l.2) - which directly contradicts the "relentlessly public" nature of Petrarchanism.⁵⁷ Silence is a feature of Renaissance love poetry - witness Shakespeare's tautological "Who is it that says most, which can say more/ Than this rich praise, that you alone are you" (s. 84) or his insistence that, looking on the young man, "we.../... lack tongues to praise" (s. 106), or Astrophil's "What may words say, or what may words not say,/ Where truth itself must speake like flatterie?" (s.35). However, not to be able to speak because you have not the skill, because you cannot, is very different to not being able to speak because you are afraid to, because you may not. As a woman in a Renaissance context, Pamphilia does not have the same access to the language of Petrarchan love and desire as Sidney's Astrophil or Shakespeare's Will. It would violate the codes of decorum if a woman were to speak public praise of a beloved. Male poets could enter into a public debate about the problems of expressing sincere love within a tradition of praise poetry; women were not to enter public debate at all, let alone one concerned with the expression of desire.

⁵⁶ "Shall I turne blabb?," 71.

⁵⁷ "Shall I turne blabb?," 76.

In order to avoid having to speak her love, then, Pamphilia says to those around her,

Good now, bee still, and doe nott mee torment
 With multitudes of questions, bee att rest,
 ... must I ever bee oprest
 With your tounge torture which will ne'er bee spent?
 Well then I see noe way butt this will fright
 That Divell speech; Alas I ame possesst,
 And mad folks senceles ar of wisdomes right. (P52 ll.1-11)

Thus her words, the coins with which she enters into an exchange with the language of Petrarchanism, are rendered foolish and garbled: "I ame possesst/ And mad folks senceles ar of wisdomes right." Speech becomes a devil, the torture instrument of the outside world from which Pamphilia must hide her love, and therefore her words. While she has succeeded in producing a Petrarchan sonnet-cycle she has also to recant that very cycle, in that she must reject its language, because Petrarchanism posits women as "the muse and not the maker."⁵⁸ Thus Pamphilia's poetry is fraught with the anxiety that the tradition within which she writes cannot accommodate her.

There is a reciprocal refusal at work here too. Masten says,

The sonnets' insistent withdrawal - their repudiation of public Petrarchan discourse and its inauthentic 'open shows,' 'shapes,' and 'fashions' - registers at a number of levels a refusal to circulate. Pamphilia refuses to construct herself or circulate as a Petrarchan sign, eschewing the signifying body of both the Petrarchan master and mistress (though she could fill either role, a writer or woman).⁵⁹

Or, she could fill neither, since speaking disqualifies her from being the mistress, and being a woman disqualifies her from being the master. She *is*, however, a writer, and here we see that the female poetic subject causes definitional and logistic problems within this masculinist Petrarchan discourse. In other words, Pamphilia's refusal to circulate is partly born of necessity, since English Petrarchanism's inherently chauvinist nature constantly thwarts her attempts to assume many aspects of its discourse.

There is a further implication of the difference in quality between Pamphilia's sense of typical Petrarchan isolation and Astrophil's. Sidney's poet has a particular kind of relationship with the world outside of his emotions that is radically different to

⁵⁸ *Feminism and Poetry*, 98.

⁵⁹ "Shall I turne blabb?", 75.

Pamphilia's, and the difference corresponds with the public/ private designation of appropriate gender roles. The opinion of those around him matters greatly to Astrophil, who suffers censure for his devotion. In sonnet 21, he replies to a nameless "friend," thus introducing a sense of dialogue with other human 'characters' in his world: "Your words my friend... blame/ My young mind marde, whom Love doth windlas so,/... Sure you say well/... now tell me this." Thus there is a relationship between Astrophil and the outside world, even if it functions only to reinforce Astrophil's Petrarchan devotion to Stella despite social criticism. There are other living presences in Astrophil and Stella - members of the court (the "Prince", "Judges" and those "curious wits" of sonnet 23), Petrarchan poets, friends, a rival (the "Good brother Philip" of sonnet 38, who, though he may be a bird, is at least alive, and not a disembodied Despair), and Stella's husband (sonnet 24's "Rich foole"). These introduce disparate focuses of attention that result in a contextualisation of the inner world of the poet-lover. In addition, sonnet 30 has a kind of international theme, providing a sense of movement in the external world within which the cycle (Astrophil's inner world) is set:

Whether the Turkish new-moone minded be
 To fill his hornes this yeare on Christian coast:
 How Poles right king meanes without leave of hoast,
 To warme with ill-made fire cold Moscovy.
 If French can yet three parts in one agree,
 What now the Dutch in their full diets boast,
 How Holland hearts, now so goode townes be lost,
 Trust in the shade of pleasing Orange tree.
 How Ulster likes of that same golden bit,
 Wherewith my father once made it halfe tame,
 If in the Scotch Court be no weltering yet.
 These questions busie wits to me do frame;
 I cumbred with good maners, answer do,
 But know not how, for still I thinke of you.

Within the context of his commitment to devote his mind to Stella, Astrophil deliberately gives the reader a sense of the busy political world within which he and Stella live. He has also indicated that he is asked for advice, and that he answers, thus placing himself in the position of an advisor of some sort, someone 'in the know' who is politically involved, and respected, in court life. The sonnet ends by telescoping its attention from Europe and all the activity there, to an intimate address to Stella. Astrophil (and, incidentally, Sidney) is firmly contextualised as involved in political

and social activities that have nothing to do with his emotional state, even as they emphasise it.

Pamphilia, on the other hand, talks only very occasionally to other living beings. She is far more concerned with parts of them, specifically their eyes, or with the metaphysical concepts she so often apostrophises. There is no venture into an outside political world, only a sense of having to hide from it. In a way, Pamphilia reveals the true agenda of Petrarchanism - a concern with the constitution of the Self - because she strips away many of the gestures that conceal the fact that Petrarchanism is a poetry of the self. In Pamphilia's case, very little else occupies the space of her poetry except her inner world, and it is an intensely private, inward-focused movement that results:

What immediately strikes the modern reader of *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* is its sustained lack of reference. Trained to mine the Riches of the biographically thick Sidneian sequence... we find within Wroth's sonnets little reference to their writer, no mention of the beloved by name (except in the title), few allusions to contemporary events... and little attempt to engage outside interlocutors... [T]hese sonnets... seem to speak an almost inscrutable private language.⁶⁰

Astrophil also enjoys his Petrarchan isolation in ways that Pamphilia cannot, even though she does choose to remain obscured. Astrophil embraces his public status as isolated lover within an external, political context. Sonnet 14 of *Astrophil and Stella* shows his acceptance, in public, of his isolation, as he addresses his tetchy words to a "friend" in the course of insisting that he will not give up his lover-status. At stake here is an issue of self-definition. Using his love as a point of difference, Astrophil defines himself as the outsider in relation to the social norms he is rejecting:

Alas have I not paine enough my friend...
While Love on me doth all his quiver spend,
But with your Rubarb words yow must contend,
To grieve me worse, in saying that Desire
Doth plunge my wel-form'd soule even in the mire
Of sinfull thoughts...
Then Love is sinne, and let me sinfull be. (s. 14)

Whereas Astrophil insists he must be a victim - the image of Love shooting all his arrows into the hapless Astrophil has a kind of sado-masochistic feel to it - Pamphilia

⁶⁰ "Shall I turne blabb?," 67.

goes to great pains to negotiate with Love, to try and redefine him so as to create an easier master for herself. I would suggest that it is because Astrophil can *choose* not be involved with the public world in a way that makes a public point and thus his posed isolation is still in keeping within the public nature of Petrarchanism, whereas Pamphilia *needs* not to be publicly circulated (or perhaps, is not allowed to be, within the confines of contemporary gender politics).

In Astrophil's well-anthologised "Moon" sonnet, sonnet 31, he dichotomises his private state and the outside world, ostensibly addressing the moon, and he does so in order pointedly to allow the world he is criticising access to his internal feelings, so that it (or Stella, acting in accordance with its rules) may hear the complaint:

With how sad steps, o Moone, thou climb'st the skies,
How silently, and with how wan a face,
What may it be, that even in heav'nly place
That busie archer his sharpe arrowes tries?...
Then ev'n of fellowship, o Moone, tell me
Is constant Love deem'd there but want of wit?
Are Beauties there as proud as here they be?...
Do they call Vertue there ungratefulnesse?

Astrophil's mournful "fellowship" with the wan moon which culminates in a flash of anger towards, ultimately, Stella's "ungratefulnesse," has a completely different tone to Pamphilia's sonnet P10, where she is similarly aware of those around her:

Bee you all pleas'd? your pleasures grive not mee:
Doe you delight? I envy nott your joy:
Have you content? contentment with you bee:
Hope you for bliss? hope still, and still injoye:
Lett sad misfortune, haples mee destroy,
Leave crosses to rule mee, and still rule free,
While all delights theyr contraries imploy
To keep good back, and I butt torments see,
Joyes are beereav'd, harmes doe only tarry;
Dispaire takes place, disdaine hath gott the hand;
Yett firme love holds my sences in such band
As since dispis'ed, I with sorrow marry;
Then if with grieve I must coupled bee
Sorrow I'le wed: Dispaire thus governs mee.

This poem, although also initially constructing a series of questions, moves in an opposite direction to Astrophil's Moone sonnet. Most obviously, Pamphilia answers her own questions, whereas Astrophil implies the answers to his, simultaneously

making the point that his questions are a rhetorical strategy to force Stella to a realisation of the real question he is asking her. Although she addresses those around her, bringing them into the poem initially, as the poem develops Pamphilia moves away from the outside world into her inner realm of suffering. The external world reappears by association in the couplet, but it is only to emphasise that her internal state cannot be accessed by anyone else (except, of course, the reader), that the consequences of her isolation must be lived by her alone. This is signalled by the use of the imperative to describe the marriage - "Then if with griefe I *must* coupled bee." A forced arranged marriage is suggested along with the notion of the suffering lover who cannot help but be "govern[ed]" by "Dispaire." In other words, the image of a woman forced into marriage with sorrow and despair, two of Pamphilia's metaphysical companions, has gender resonances in a time when aristocratic women were often used as markers of prestige and carriers of wealth, and married off accordingly. The poem thus uses the external world to make an internal point, a notion which mimics the movement of its content from questions addressed to others to private emotion. Astrophil's Moon sonnet begins by describing his inner pain and move outward, in order to use apparently private expression - a monologue to the unresponsive moon - to make a point about the public world. The sonnet ends with an outward gesture, and a sense of the intended audience, illuminating the fact that the apparent solitude of the opening moments of the sonnet is a carefully constructed public performance, whereas Pamphilia's ends with the self, alone with a metaphysical companion, till death do them part. The public performance that is an aristocratic marriage has far direr implications for a woman marrying a dread lord, then for a poet artfully posing at a window. Pamphilia begins by mentioning the joys of others, from which she is excluded, and moves through her isolation to her despair, from "Bee you all pleas'd?.../ Doe you delight?.../ Have you content?" to "Leave crosses to rule mee" to "...since despis'ed.../... Dispaire thus governs mee." Thus the notion of the isolated lover, typical of the English Petrarchan convention, is very different in tone when expressed by its first female proponent.

A more detailed investigation of what is at stake in the process of self-constitution that is at the heart of Petrarchanism will account for the reason behind the qualitative difference that keeps recurring in Wroth's use of the genre. Montefiore

locates the action of Lacan's mirror phase in the workings of Petrarchanism, a useful way to explain the way the speaking self uses the beloved as a point of identity:

The relation between poet and mistress-muse... repeats in its characteristic structure and energies, the dyadic relation between mother and infant which... Lacan named 'Imaginary.' The term means "a basically narcissistic relation of the subject to his (sic) ego, a relationship to other subjects as my 'counterparts,' ... a relation to meaning in terms of resemblance and unity."⁶¹

This is the psychoanalytic equivalent to Fineman's linguistic reflexive reflection, a mirroring of the poet's subjectivity that acquires a concrete, referential 'reality' - human psychological development - in Lacanian terms. The mirror-phase of a child's development marks the moment in which a sense of personal identity is acquired, a " 'recognition' of self that is accompanied by immense pleasure."⁶² Pamphilia's poetry displays a distinct lack of "immense pleasure" - a lack which contrasts sharply with Astrophil's moments of "mad... delight" (s.81), particularly in the celebration of the kiss he receives in sonnets 79 to 82, and Shakespeare's complicated maneuvers to assure himself of his young man's love, such as sonnet 136's "Make but my name thy love, and love that still,/ And then thou lovest me for my name is *Will*." There is a very clear sense of isolated, unending pain that pervades Pamphilia's poetry of solitude. This is because the Petrarchan action that constructs a language whereby a speaking self can use the body of the beloved to reflect and confirm the identity of the speaker is based on the notion that the speaking self is a male subject, and thus, by its overt declaration of heterosexual love, the beloved is a created female subject. This partly could account for why Shakespeare's poetry of devotion to his "fair, kind and true" young man feels so one-sided, why there is a fundamental instability in the poet's subjectivity that is reflected, for instance, in the linguistic ambiguities in so many of the sonnets that undermine their apparent conclusions - the male poet struggles to find a safe, stable reflection in a male beloved, even while making obvious and concrete the poetics of likeness and sameness that underlie the Petrarchan creation of a beloved. Fineman suggests that the essentially male, homosexual nature of Petrarchan desire is exposed in Shakespeare's sonnets to the young man, "as though homosexuality were the secret truth of all ideal and idealizing desire form

⁶¹ *Feminism and Poetry*, 99.

⁶² *Ibid.*

Dante onwards... [S]tripped... to their bare essences and essentials, the familiar and kindly ideals of Petrarchan erotics, metaphysics, poetics end up displaying and praising a kind of lurid... 'sameness', as though this is what ideal beatitude inevitably amounts to."⁶³ It is precisely this denial of real difference, the fact that the beloved is a constructed, created female subject representing an imposed notion of ideal femininity, and can never mark any truly 'female' presence, that makes this Petrarchanism a masculinist discourse, that makes it impossible for a female poet to have access to the same assumptions as a male poet. There are no female-as-norm subjectivities within English Petrarchan discourse. This accounts for Montefiore's comment on the Petrarchan love poetry of later female poets:

Whereas, the Imaginary poem enacts a fantasy of plenitude, of an Other who creates and grants one's own identity, these women poets begin with the premise that love is, for whatever reason, not fully returned, and satisfaction is not granted, even in fantasy.⁶⁴

In Pamphilia's poetry too, within a context of genre and history where women are openly othered, she cannot herself embark on the strategy of othering. This is because, in a general formulation of Petrarchan self-other, it is the woman who is Other. The fantasy of satisfaction that can occur when union with the Other is achieved, cannot be available to a poetic subject already conceived of as that Other. Thus Pamphilia's refusal/ inability to draw constituting subjective strength from her beloved is clear in her non-blazoning Petrarchanism, in the non-satisfaction promised in her beloved's name. Similarly, her self-silencing and -protecting impulses take on deeper significance: she must move inwards in a defensive gesture, since she cannot direct a sense of self outwards onto a relationship with her beloved. This is not to imply that Pamphilia is only a disempowered victim, as there are places in her text where she asserts her own subjectivity very strongly, as will be discussed in the next three chapters. And, following psychoanalytic literary criticism to its roots to reveal the historical assumptions within the Western canon, that speaking loving subjects are always already gendered, it becomes apparent that Pamphilia cannot find a self-image reflected off her beloved within the overtly heterosexual love dynamic of masculinist Petrarchanism:

⁶³ *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye*, 256.

⁶⁴ *Feminism and Poetry*, 136.

Freud suggests that the lover is always masculine: in 'A Case of Female Homosexuality' he writes of his patient that "in her behaviour to her love-object she had throughout assumed the masculine part [...] she displayed the [...] sublime overvaluation of the sexual object so characteristic of the male lover [...], and the preference for being the lover rather than the beloved."⁶⁵

Thus the ways in which the Petrarchan discourse has informed Western notions of love have very significant implications even for modern subjectivities; it seems obvious that Freud is drawing on a naturalised conceptualisation of the male lover as expressed by Petrarchanism. Montefiore concludes: "[S]ince the great tradition of love-poems is masculine in origin, it is not surprising that... the love-poem presents problems to women poets."⁶⁶

Hence Pamphilia's relationship in her love poetry is not with her beloved but with herself, a circular motion that makes the process of self-constitution a hollow activity, an activity of absence. Wroth therefore creates a new kind of absence in a discourse of love that posits absence as the absence of union with a beloved present linguistically or as a 'character' in the text, that projects desire outwards onto the beloved constructed by the poetry. Wroth's Petrarchanism becomes a discourse of self-absence in a radical new way. It is precisely Pamphilia's refusal (or, perhaps more accurately, inability) to force Amphilanthus to occupy an Othered position, it is that fact that he does not (or cannot, since he barely appears in the poetry) be made to reflect her self back at her, that informs her poetry with the difference it manifests. Pamphilia cannot comfortably assume the laurel of the Petrarchan lover, with its promise of beatitude, because she is a woman, and all the terms of English Petrarchanism are silently loaded with the proviso that its speaking subject is a male subject.

Rather, in Pamphilia's clear designation of her use of the Image in the opening sonnet of the sequence, it can be said that she is using Petrarchanism itself as a mirror to reflect the distorted image of woman that it presents. This would account for the violence she does to her own image reflected back at her by the poetic form into which she is trying to project herself, and it would also account, once again, for the way she is thrown back into a circular motion of self-on-self, rather than self-on-other.

⁶⁵ *Feminism and Poetry*, 108.

⁶⁶ *Feminism and Poetry*, 109.

Sonnet P48 documents Pamphilia's uncertainty about the reflection she is seeing, as much in its curious diction as in its expression of dissatisfaction of self:

If ever love had force in humaine brest?
 If ever hee could move in pensive hart?...
 Then looke on mee; I ame to thes adrest,
 I, ame the soule that feeles the greatest smart;
 I, ame that hartles trunk of harts depart...
 I should nott have bin made this stage of woe
 Wher sad disasters have theyr open showe. (ll. 1-13)

The poem begins by questioning the veracity of love as expressed by Petrarchanism, given the convention's idealising and silencing properties. And if this seems like an over-reading of the poem, the odd resonances created by the double question, "If ever love had force in humaine brest?" can be seen, by its use of the question mark (that makes the provisional statement marked by the "If" which is confirmed by Pamphilia's presentation of herself as proof, "Then looke on mee,") to be doubting that love itself ever did have force in human breast. This second question can metatextually be addressed to the tradition of love poetry Wroth has inherited, and linked to the fact that Pamphilia can create only interiority from her Petrarchanism since she cannot constitute herself through an externally projected reflection. "If interiority exists..., the speaker claims with her repeated and emphatically punctuated 'I, ame' that she is its exemplary embodiment."⁶⁷ Thus this sonnet can be read not only as an indication of the "emergent private space"⁶⁸ within Wroth's work, but as an explanation for why such a space is necessary.

Following the logic of this second question, Pamphilia's explicit insistence to her reader, "Then looke on mee; I ame to thes adrest" becomes an overt questioning of the distorted image of the female beloved. Pamphilia, commenting on Petrarchanism's constant move to compress the female body into a mirror off which a masculine self-image can be formulated, offers herself as that which cannot be accommodated in such a reflexive schematic: I am the lover who is also a woman. Where does my love fit in here? The answer is significant: "I, ame that hartles trunk of harts depart." Once again, Pamphilia is reduced to her absent heart - to absence. This is because her situation - that of a female Petrarchan lover - is indeed absent in the

⁶⁷ "Shall I turne blabb?," 74.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

traditional Petrarchan formula/tion of self. If I am allowed to continue following the second question, and to impose another level of metatextuality onto this poem, Pamphilia's couplet becomes the only response women within Petrarchanism, functioning as beloveds, can ever have: "I should nott have bin made this stage of woe/ Wher sad disasters have theyr open showe."

There is a convolution in the poem that is brought out by this ending. Throughout the sonnet, Pamphilia presents herself emphatically to the reader as proof of her point, as proof of her pain, with her insistent "I, ame" following the invitation to "looke on mee." Yet, at the poem's conclusion, she bemoans the fact that she has been presented, in a way that metaphorically transforms herself as subject into a stage, into that which facilitates public presentation. It is precisely the public presentation that is an integral part of Petrarchan poetry that Pamphilia finds so painful. "I should nott have binn made this stage of woe" she says, and significantly it is on her subject that "sad disasters have theyr open showe." Is her offering up of herself to be viewed initially, an attempt to control the circulation into which she is put as a Petrarchan woman? Or is it rather an attempt to reveal the nature of that circulation, by positing herself as the stage, and the action of Petrarchan love as the tragedy it facilitates? What is clear is that she objects to her love being made public, to her pain being a show to entertain an audience, which almost amounts to an objection that her poems are being read at all. This is the logical conclusion of her interiority, of her refusal to circulate, of her desire to hide herself and her love from "all watching eyes." The writing woman struggles to write as a woman in a world of Petrarchan rules where women's bodies are always facilitators, always stages for somebody else's shows. There is a fundamental contradiction in writing Petrarchan poetry that does not want to be public, especially when the act of writing itself perpetuates the act of staging. However, by claiming that she does not want to be "this stage of woe" within a poem that stages herself as precisely that, Pamphilia may be appropriating a space traditionally denied to women. The intense theatricality of her metaphor is significant in an age where women were not allowed onto the stage at all. By making herself into a public stage of woe, Pamphilia is not only revealing the fact that she is transgressing onto a space that claims to represent female characters but in reality does not, she is also making that space available to a woman.

Pamphilia can be read as rejecting both the options Masten says are open to her - writer or woman within Petrarchanism. On the obvious level, she is rejecting her status as a Petrarchan lover - "I should nott have bin made" into this suffering, loving, public self, which is, after all, the definition of the Petrarchan poet. Also, as an exploration of the terms within which she is writing, marked by her double question at the poems inception, the poem registers a strong unhappiness to be "made this stage." Nevertheless, by rejecting the public nature of Petrarchan poetry from within a Petrarchan counterdiscourse, and by using a theatrical metaphor, Pamphilia manages to undermine the theatrical nature of Petrarchanism and the nature of Jacobean theatricality.

The notion of the Image is an important one in Petrarchanism. From the Ideal Lady of the *stilnovisti* poets, whom Spiller places as creating the stage in the sonnet's development that is prior to Petrarch's,⁶⁹ to Fineman's explication of Renaissance love poetry as visual, based on the notion of how the light given off by the Ideal leads the poet to the Idea of perfection when gazed upon,⁷⁰ the beloved has always been an Ideal Image facilitating the lover's spiritual relationship with Holy Light itself. Pamphilia uses this conceit in sonnet P98.

When I beeheld the Image of my deere
 With greedy lookes mine eyes would that way bend,
 Fear, and desire did inwardly contend;
 Feare to be mark'd, desire to drawe still neere,
 And in my soule a speritt would apeere,
 Which boldnes waranted, and did pretend
 To bee my genius, yett I durst nott lend
 My eyes in trust wher others seemed soe cleere...
 Yett in my hart unseene of jealous eye
 The truer Image shall in triumph lye.

Since Pamphilia is not explicit about what the initial Image actually is - his face, a painting, a reflection, a memory - what it signifies is the lover as a potential Ideal Image, a possible pathway to the Ideal. The desire to view with "greedy looks" is a typical Petrarchan action. However, a new element in the action is Pamphilia's once again emphatically punctuated "Fear" and it is a "Feare to be marked." This is counter to the very notion of Petrarchanism, since it is the act of looking - and thus falling in

⁶⁹ The Development of the Sonnet, chapter three.

⁷⁰ Shakespeare's Perjured Eye.

love - that begins the Petrarchan lover's process. If this Petrarchan lover has to guard against a "jealous eye," her Petrarchanism becomes fundamentally private in nature, and this protective inwardness becomes the starting point for her status as lover, preceding the initial gaze as a primary consideration. Pamphilia cannot be seen to be a gazer because it is only the male gaze that can begin the Petrarchan moment.

Similarly, a "speritt" - which in a Renaissance context means a devil - tries to trick Pamphilia into believing it is her "genius," the protective spirit that each mortal receives at birth and which determines the quality of their nature; and the "genius" of inspiration that allows artistic ability. Thus, although she is falsely assured she can write Petrarchan poetry, she cannot, "durst not," "lend my eyes in trust." There is a feeling of extreme danger, the feeling that she dare not trust the impulse to gaze and thus to write. She does not ever say what the danger itself is, although it is hinted at in the quatrain left out of the poem as it is quoted above:

Then did I search from whence this danger 'rose,
If such unworthynes in mee did rest
As my sterv'd eyes must nott with sight bee blest;
When jèalousie her poyson did disclose;

Yett in my heart unseene of jealous eye
The truer Image shall in triumph lye.

The danger, then, is that the public knowledge that she is a loving subject would result in "jealousie," and the subsequent "poyson" this would "disclose" has life-threatening implications.⁷¹ Who it is that would be jealous of Pamphilia's ability to possess a Petrarchan gaze is never revealed, beyond a general sense that her entire context is dangerous. The jealousy could be her own, since she loves an unfaithful man. Perhaps it would be too much to suggest that Pamphilia is referring to other male poets whose position she is occupying, or even Petrarchanism itself, but the poem's very indeterminacy leaves it open to accommodating the logic of my argument. The mention of her "unworthynes" to be able to gaze further fits into a notion that a woman poet is barred from entering Petrarchan discourse to occupy the traditionally male position of lover.

⁷¹ This is the same danger Stella faces in the Eleventh Song of *Astrophil and Stella*, where she warns Astrophil, "Well, be gone, be gone I say,/ Lest that *Argus* eyes perceive you." The danger of being caught by household guards is very real, as Astrophil replies, "O unjust fortunes sway,/ Which can make me thus to leave you,/ And from lowts to run away."

Pamphilia's eyes are both "greedy" and "sterv'd," continuing the feeding imagery that recurs throughout the sequence, and containing again the notion that this whole enterprise is life-threatening - deprivation of sustenance eventually leads to death. The impression of deep dissatisfaction, that her eyes are not being fed and are aching to be, is also important when placed within a tradition that is based on the visual. English Renaissance love poetry, the poetic space "wher others [eyes] seemed soe cleere" was a tradition created by and for male poets. Thus the very poetics with which she is engaging are not only unaccommodating but dangerous. Pamphilia treads very thin ice indeed, and it is once again her ability to turn inwards that is her only solace, and the place of safety for her eyes. It is "in my hart unseene of jealous eye" that "the truer Image shall in triumph lye." This is the standard invocation of the image of the beloved in the poet's heart, the source of love and inspiration, but is very different in tone from Astrophil's similar solution, "Foole, said my Muse to me, looke in thy heart and write." Pamphilia's muse is an evil, deceptive, demonic spirit, and she cannot look in her heart and write - she has to look in her heart and hide. Also, the power of the beloved to function as an Image of the Ideal is subverted. It is not Amphilanthus's Image which she can gaze upon that will then engrave an Image in her heart. This picture of the beloved should be the source of inspiration, to which she can refer in order to write reflectively reflexive poetry. This poetry should draw her closer to a spiritual and philosophical Ideal even as, or because, it draws her closer to herself. Instead, she is left gazing on her heart, without the safety to extend beyond herself, her own hidden processes. And, since her heart is absent, she is left gazing on the absence that forms the core of her Petrarchan self. Once again, the internal, circular motion that is her only recourse within the usually blatantly public statement that is Petrarchan desire is what Pamphilia is left with, in this case for her own safety within a tricky and dangerous terrain. She feels the force of Petrarchan love and desire because she is a Petrarchan lover, but she cannot trust the very impulses she consequently must feel.

The pain Pamphilia suffers as a Petrarchan lover, and the threat of her poetic "death" as part of the typical Petrarchan complaint that the lover will die for love if unattended, seems much more threatening to Pamphilia than it traditionally is to the importunate poet. Astrophil fits comfortably into the persona of despairing lover - he fits better into the sheath of threatened death, as it were, with the concomitant threat

of the lack of future praise. In other words, using the Renaissance pun on orgasm as the little death, Astrophil's prophylactic paradoxically ensures the reproduction of his poetry, and unsurprisingly is not available to Pamphilia. Astrophil's stylised poetic pain which ensures the continuation of self by being part of the monologue aimed at the beloved, becomes the threat of the pain of self-dissolution for Pamphilia, because it forces her to confront her absence. This is opposite to the traditional Petrarchan method of dealing with absence, which is to fill it with an always almost-realised promise. The act of writing in the first place for her is the cause of 'physical' pain and disintegration (in the self-blazon evinced) and of 'psychic' discomfort (in the inability to constitute a traditionally reflected self and the concomitant motion of circularity around a void).

Thus the difference between Pamphilia's Petrarchanism and Astrophil's as a more typical, male, Petrarchan lover is extended into the ways both poets express their frustration at finding themselves in the dependent lovers' position. Nevertheless, Astrophil's ability to assume the lover's position with the assurance that it will reflect well on himself is in stark contrast to Pamphilia's deep discomfort. In sonnet 40 of Astrophil and Stella he says:

As good to write as for to lie and grone
 O *Stella* deare, how much thy power hath wrought,
 That hast my mind, none of the basest, brought
 My still kept course...
 Thou canst vouchsafe the influence of a thought
 Upon a wretch, that long thy grace hath sought;
 Weigh then how I by thee am overthrowne:
 And then, thinke thus, although thy beautie be
 Made manifest by such a victorie,
 Yet noblest Conquerours do wreckes avoid.
 Since then thou hast so farre subdued me,
 That in my heart I offer still to thee,
 O do not let thy Temple be destroyed.

Although he places himself at her mercy, as a 'wretch' who has to plead not to be "destroy[ed]," Astrophil actually uses the opportunity of having been conquered to emphasise his own sense of worth. His mind is "none of the basest," and he designates himself a holy and beautiful place, Stella's "Temple." Thus by praising her for having been able to overthrow such a distinguished mind, and by emphasising that her virtues

are powerful indeed if they make him worship her, he reflects the praise back on himself, as a worthy subject of such emotion.

In the history of the sonnet,

from Dante through Petrarch, through to the high or 'golden' moment of the Elizabethan sonnet tradition, poets continue to employ the theory and topoi of praise... [A]s the sonnet develops... this employment grows increasingly artificial and self-conscious... praise becomes explicitly a praise of its own praise... Correspondingly, at the level of theme, the sonnet... concerns itself with the way it praises rather than with what it praises, no longer foregrounding the object of its own praise, but, more pointedly, its epideictic subject, both the subject it speaks thematically about - i.e., its praise - and the subject who speaks - i.e. The praising poet.⁷²

Wroth's persona fits into this explication of the sonnet's history exactly, because if the sonnet moves towards a poetics that does not foreground the object of praise, it moves towards Pamphilia's absent Amphilanthus. But praise itself cannot be said to be the main matter of her poetry. Instead, the Petrarchan concern with the self becomes the central locus of these poems in a way, and with an anxiety, that is different in quality to the tradition Wroth has inherited. In the very expression of his submission, Astrophil is maintaining Stella's status as the typical Petrarchan mistress, with all its implications of where power actually lies in the relationship. Stella is victorious because her "beautie be/ Made manifest by such a victorie." She becomes an objectified, purified goddess, and in her subduing is herself subdued. Astrophil's self-disempowerment is willingly assumed, and is in fact far more of a disempowerment of the woman he is determined to adore. Petrarchanism, while seemingly the language of transcendent love, is in fact in many ways a "discourse of control and domination."⁷³ Astrophil knowingly gains from being "overthrowne," because, as he acknowledges, it is "... good to write" about his Petrarchan state. The humour with which his conquered state and supposedly imminent death is expressed - "O do not let thy Temple be destroyed" - further adds to the sense of his enjoyment of his own ability to love and to write about it. In sonnet 44 he says, "My words I know do well set forth my mind," and in sonnet 34,

Come let me write, and to what end? To ease
A burthned heart...
Art not asham'd to publish thy disease?

⁷² *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye*, 192.

⁷³ *English Poetry of the Sixteenth Century*, 81.

Nay, that may breed my fame, it is so rare...

Astrophil's extremely poetic sense of his own pain, and the benefits thereof - it is the source of his means to express his skill and garner fame thereby - can be compared to Pamphilia's pain as an unrequited Petrarchan lover. Nowhere does she express the sentiment that she benefits artistically or personally from being in such a position, even though the paradox is precisely that Wroth has chosen the Image with great awareness, that only a Petrarchan lover can write Petrarchan poetry. To an unnamed Amphilanthus Pamphilia says,

O strive nott still to heap disdaine on mee,
 Nor pleasure take your cruelty to show
 On hapless mee, on whom all sorrows flow...
 Long have I suffer'd, and esteem'd it deere
 Wish you my end? Say soe, you shall itt have...
 ... now I'll seeke it, since you will nott save. (P6)

The notions of the disdainful beloved taking pleasure in showing cruelty on a long-suffering lover who threatens death if the beloved does not requite the attention, are all typically Petrarchan. Yet nowhere in this sonnet are there strategies to point out the lover's great worth, beyond her ability to suffer. And indeed, her ability to be constant is precisely what Pamphilia ends her sequence with, assuming constancy as the primary defining factor of her poetic self. All she has, ultimately, is the ability to suffer, since she cannot constitute a sense of self successfully, in the usual Petrarchan manner.

Given all the difficulties inherent in Pamphilia's existence as a female Petrarchan lover, it is notable that only once does she try to shift the responsibility of her Petrarchan state, with its destructive tendencies. This is also the only sonnet that contains other human characters, with whom Pamphilia has a kind of voyeuristic relationship. This is in sonnet P27:

Once did I heere an aged father say
 Unto his sonn who with attention hears
 What age, and wise experience ever clears
 From doubts of feare, or reason to betray,
 My sonne sayd he, beehold thy father, gray,
 I once had as thou hast, fresh tender years,
 And like thee sported, destitute of feares
 Butt my young faults made mee too soone decay,
 Love once I did, and like thee fear'd my love,
 Led by the hatefull thread of Jelousy,

Striving to keepe, I lost my liberty,
 And gain'd my griefe which still my sorrows move,
 In time shunn this; To love is noe offence
 Butt doubt in youth, in age breeds penitence.

Suddenly an external narrative enters into Pamphilia's internal space, the private space vocalised by the sonnets. Seen in context with the two preceding sonnets, the significance of, and the movement towards, the external space of sonnet P27 can be traced. Sonnet P25 is "Like to the Indians," which chronicles Pamphilia's internal devotion to love - it will be remembered that she asks to wear "Cupid's might/ In heart as they in skin.../ Not ceasing offerings to love while I Live" (12-14). Sonnet P26 contrasts Pamphilia's Petrarchan isolation to the life at court:

When every one to pleasing pastimes hies
 Some hunt, some hauke, some play...
 When others hunt, my thoughts have I in chase;
 If hauke, my mind at wished end doth fly
 Discourse, I with my spirit tauke (*ll.* 1-11)

The point being made by this progression is perhaps this: the pagan Indians in the preceding sonnet occupy the same position as the court does in this one - Pamphilia compares her unique state to both groups. Thus Pamphilia (and perhaps Wroth) may be indicating the "savagery" at court within which a woman attempting to chase her own thoughts - and gaze her own gazes and write her own poetry - would have had to contend. That the environment is an extremely unsafe one is corroborated not only by Pamphilia's continual need to ensure she is not revealed - she is certainly constantly monitored - but by the detail in P27 that the young man can listen to the advice in safety only because "age, and wise experience ever clears/ From doubts of feare, or reason to betray." This a world of fear and betrayal, where only the old and harmless can be trusted, where to have no fear is to be "destitute."

So, having moved from the exotic to the known, from the Indians to the Court, and having seen both in the context of Pamphilia's feelings (which themselves move from the exotic to the known - from the identification with a pagan Love God to a woman sitting quietly alone at court), we move finally to the narrative of the two men in sonnet P27. There is a progression from unreality - the strange world of the Indians - through Pamphilia's "reality" - the court - to a scene of completely external reality, where Pamphilia's emotions are not directly present at all. It is almost as if, in

order to facilitate another voice in her poetry, the way that Astrophil constantly does through representing dialogue in his, she has to move slowly away from her internal circular monologue, not wrenching a break in the circle, but creating a flowing movement that will maintain its integrity.

Now the question of to whom sonnet P27 is addressed arises. Pamphilia is discreetly warning Amphilanthus, casting him in the projected image of the old man, who knows that "doubt in youth, in age breeds penitence." The old man, because he is an unfulfilled lover, is made Petrarchan, feeling pain, although through his own actions rather than through the disdain of whomever it was that he loved: "Led by the hatefull thread of Jelousy,/... I lost my liberty,/ And gained my grief, which still my sorrows move." Perhaps Pamphilia is trying to pass the burden of Petrarchanism onto Amphilanthus, prophesying the pain that will be his in some projected future if he does not allay the pain that is hers now. Like the old man, who has lost his love through his own folly, through submitting to the jealousy and distrust of the jealous and untrustworthy world Pamphilia has discussed in other sonnets - in other words, through following its rules, as Amphilanthus is doing by being an untrue lover of two - Amphilanthus will regret torturing Pamphilia by being a cruel beloved. This is certainly an original strategy of persuasion. However, Amphilanthus is also symbolically the young man, since the moral of the story is aimed at him. He effectively occupies both subject positions in the sonnet's story. The sonnet thus has a plenitude of Amphilanthus, and a dearth of Pamphilia, who is present only as an eavesdropper in the first line, "Once did I heere..." So the only sonnet in the sequence that admits of the presence of the beloved, does not only not mention his name, but takes place in an external space from the sonnet sequence as a whole, and without the overt presence of the lover, emphasising Pamphilia's displacement of her own subjectivity. It is almost the ultimate defensive strategy on Pamphilia's behalf - if you can't see her, you can't catch her.

Montefiore says that what is at stake for the male sonneteer is finally the definition of his self "through his desire either for the image of the beloved or for his own image mediated through her response to him."⁷⁴ Wroth's Pamphilia cannot constitute an image of herself out of a tradition created to express male subjectivity by

⁷⁴ Feminism and Poetry, 106.

assembling a notion of the female in order to flatten and scatter it, in a way that is fundamentally silencing. Because genres that are created out of a specific cultural context with its concomitant notions of gender will reflect the implications of those notions within its rules, constraints and strategies, "women's poetry does not - in fact cannot - reproduce men's."⁷⁵ Wroth's specific use of, and often fraught interactions with, Petrarchanism exemplify a notion of difference - of expression and of subject formation - for a woman poet working within an inherited generic form. It is the form itself that functions as the arena of difference. Indeed, "The extreme codification of... Petrarchanism establishes a common linguistic ground against which gender-differentiated writing practices come into high relief."⁷⁶ Thus the Petrarchanism that Wroth enters is warped and changed by her presence, even as Pamphilia is warped by Petrarchanism. Nevertheless, by revealing many of the restrictive implications of Petrarchanism for a speaking female beloved, Wroth has reworked the tradition, creating a counter-discourse. In the process, she has created the first English female Petrarchan lover. In doing so, Wroth forces Petrarchan poetry to accommodate her exploration of female subjectivity.

⁷⁵ "Assimilation with a Difference," 153.

⁷⁶ The Currency of Eros, 7.

Chapter 4: “There was a woman known to be so bold”: The problems with speaking desire

There was a woman known to be so bold,
That she was noted for a common scold...
She should be ducked over head and ears,
In a deep pond, before her overseers
- *The Anatomy of a Woman's Tongue* 1638¹

When Wroth wrote Pamphilia to Amphilanthus, there was a strong Renaissance squeamishness surrounding the notion of female desire. “[H]owever they actually lived, in the new ideology a spiritualized noble love supplemented the experience of men while it defined extramarital experience for the lady. For women, chastity had become the convention of the Renaissance.”² How then does a Petrarchan poet express erotic desire if she is also a woman?

The nature of Petrarchan desire is not easily definable, but, like so many other aspects of the tradition when it comes to gender issues, is in debate. It is necessary to begin an investigation into desire and its gendered implications in Wroth's Petrarchanism with a brief response to Heather Dubrow's 1995 book on the subject, Echoes of Desire, because her definition of the workings of desire in Petrarchanism in many ways contradicts mine.

I will be discussing the assertion that Pamphilia has to express her desire in a way different to that of her male predecessors. Indeed, any discussion of difference is apposite to a discussion of Petrarchanism, since “Petrarchism... is grounded in attempts at differentiation.”³ Petrarchan poets typically emphasise difference - between themselves and other poets, as well as between lover and mistress, even as they attempt to break down any difference that may exist between self and beloved⁴ in an attempt to achieve true unity. Dubrow sees Petrarchan texts as being characterised by slippages between these sets of difference: “male and female, powerful and

¹ Qtd. Angeline Goreau, The Whole Duty of a Woman: Female Writers in Seventeenth Century England (New York: Dial, 1984), 154.

² Becoming Visible, 193.

³ Echoes of Desire, 11.

⁴ Echoes of Desire, 12.

powerless, successful and unsuccessful, Petrarchan and anti-Petrarchan” slide between each other in her formulation. There are no “clear-cut separations.”⁵

As an example of gender slippages, as proof of the fact that Petrarch is both the “master and slave of gender,”⁶ Dubrow says that Petrarch in his *Rime sparse* confounds subject and object; in other words, both he and Laura wear veils, both are likened to a stone, both sing. This “complicates gender categories in ways that English poets were to pursue.”⁷ But it is precisely the difference in quality of the writing of male and female poets that current Renaissance scholarship is concerned with explicating. This is being explored by examining female writers, not male writers who create a notion of the female in their work.⁸ If Laura is a creation of her poet-lover, then the fact that he assigns similar metaphorical status to both himself and her does not signify that Petrarchanism is ungendered, that it is concerned with slippages between difference (since it is not really ‘true’ difference Petrarch is encountering), or that gender makes no difference to subjectivity in the form. Rather, it tells us something about Petrarch’s construction of his own gendered self. Or, as Butler puts it, “The relation between the masculine and feminine cannot be represented in a signifying economy in which the masculine constitutes the closed circle of signifier and signified.”⁹

This un-gender-specific yet differentiating desire Dubrow calls diacritical desire. Diacritical desire is “the desire to make distinctions, its relationship to desire in the erotic sense, and the markers that attempt to establish such boundaries.”¹⁰ In other words, it is not only the impulse to make distinctions but also the ways (presumably textual) in which distinctions are made. Dubrow traces the Petrarchan concern with other poets to Petrarch’s diacritical desire, where rivalry is not only established with other men, other poets, but also with earlier versions of the self (an example is Petrarch’s first *rime*, where he says, “O you who hear in scattered rhymes the sound/ Of that wailing.../ In my first youthful error, when in part/ I was not the same man

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Echoes of Desire*, 28.

⁷ *Echoes of Desire*, 41.

⁸ See, for example, the work of Ann Rosalind Jones, Eve Beilin and Tina Krontiris cited in the course of this thesis.

⁹ *Gender Trouble*, 11.

¹⁰ *Echoes of Desire*, 11.

who treads this ground”¹¹). The poetry’s “subtext is a relationship between men based on repudiation rather than affinity.”¹² If the basis of this diacritical desire is found in Petrarch, and if it comes from a masculine homotextual relationship based on the difference rather than the affinity between *men*, then how does Pamphilia deal with Petrarchanism’s diacritical desire? Where does she locate her competitive difference from other poets in her tradition? And how does she speak an erotic love that is founded as much in competition as in sexual desire when an Englishwoman had not previously written Petrarchan poetry? How, in fact, does a woman speak her desire in a context of both form and history where to speak female desire was taboo?

The questions Dubrow asks of diacritical desire reveal that it is a masculine desire: “why is diacritical desire more intense in the sonnet form than, say, in pastoral? What are the connections between the desire to distinguish oneself from other men and the desire to pursue a woman?”¹³ That diacritical desire may be very present in pastoral for women writers is pointed out by Ann Rosalind Jones in her discussion of the songs in Wroth’s sonnet sequence.¹⁴ Exploring the way Wroth (and Gaspara Stampa) uses the pastoral especially in her songs, Jones sees the construction of abandonment - in other words, of being differentiated and excluded - as a necessary excuse for writing a “permissibly powerful poetic sequence.”¹⁵

Psychoanalytic criticism, broadly, relies on models of differentiation, positing the movement towards differentiation from the mother as the starting point of male psychological development.¹⁶ But Dubrow argues that this is too simplistic a definition of male differentiation (and by discussing issues of differentiation as issues around the theorising of male differentiation, assumes that subjectivity in the sonnets is male subjectivity), and asks for a reinterpretation of the models in order to explicate the similarities between competitive male diacritical desire and male heterosexual erotic desire, “the drive to distinguish oneself from other men and the drive to pursue a woman.”¹⁷ Again, her questions assume that Petrarchanism fundamentally speaks male desire, as indeed I am arguing it does, but without asking also what the

¹¹ *Sonnets & Songs*, trans. Anna Maria Armistead, (New York: Pantheon, 1946), 3.

¹² *Echoes of Desire*, 48.

¹³ *Echoes of Desire*, 51.

¹⁴ *The Currency of Eros*, chapter four.

¹⁵ *The Currency of Eros*, 123.

¹⁶ *Echoes of Desire*, 50.

¹⁷ *Echoes of Desire*, 50-51.

implications are for a woman writing within this form. Thus her discussion of Wroth's work in chapter three of her book does not explicate the complications of diacritical desire for a female poet, but assumes an unbroken continuum in Wroth's counterdiscursive use of the Petrarchan tradition.

As part of the project to historicise psychoanalytic criticism, Dubrow points out that a mortality crisis occurred in England between 1557 and 1559, and thus any psychoanalytic notion of the family romance must be complicated.¹⁸ The use of wetnurses, the rate of remarriage with the half- and step- siblings that would have resulted, must all have had an effect on the writers of the time.¹⁹ Thus "rivalries with a half- or stepsibling are echoed in the diacritical rivalry between poets of the same generation which is so characteristic of English Petrarchanism."²⁰ Although this begs the question of individual writers - Shakespeare and Sidney did not come from divided families for example, as indeed, neither did Wroth - the way it accounts for the poetic competition within the form is an interesting angle. However, again, it is male subjectivity and male desire we are discussing here. The notion of competition for female attention within a shared tradition, which is linked to the presentation of the mistress's body to other men, both presuppose a certain kind of male subjectivity, where conquest and domination define self-worth. "Just as Luce Irigaray (in a feminist reworking of Levi-Strauss) argues that the circulation of women subtends and supports a heterosexual economy, so too does the production and circulation of poetry depend upon the exchange of female representations, whose sexuality is both guarded and displayed in the contest of poetic male rivalry."²¹

Dubrow does not dwell on this implication, saying instead that although Petrarchanism enacts this psychoanalytic drive towards differentiation and shows how it has failed, it also offers a solution by eliding gender differences:

Paradoxically, the very discourse that aims to define male subjectivity does so in terms that subvert that aim: the activities constructed as prototypically male, notably the quest for Laura and the laurel, are precisely those pursuits that blur the line between male and female. For the devotee of erotic love..., gender lines break down, imprisoning the lover in a labyrinth of conflicting definitions of

¹⁸ As indeed Gary Waller offers on Wroth's family and context in "Mary Wroth and the Sidney family Romance: Gender Construction in Early Modern England" in *Reading Mary Wroth* 35-63.

¹⁹ *Echoes of Desire*, 51-2.

²⁰ *Echoes of Desire*, 52-3.

²¹ *Ventriloquized Voices*, 9.

male and female. Petrarch, like his followers, is a prisoner of gender no less than a prisoner of sex.²²

Instead, she says that, since the definition of self cannot be grounded in the difference between self and beloved, it is grounded in the difference between self and rival poet. Since Wroth's Pamphilia has no rival poet in her sonnets (except perhaps Wroth's uncle Sidney²³) and does not overtly define herself in opposition to other writers *or* her beloved, both the notions of diacritical desire and the gloss on psychoanalytic definition offered by Dubrow fail to account for Pamphilia's female desiring self. This is precisely because the assertion that gender differences do not exist within Petrarchanism negates gender as a defining category. But even the terms in which Dubrow talks about this gender indeterminacy contradict the implications of her definitions of diacritical desire:

His [the lover's] relationship with women is not the excuse for homosocial desire but rather the conundrum that necessitates and shapes his relationship with men; the male-female interaction is not erased.²⁴

In other words, the binary is still there but has ceased to be an issue we need to talk about. This is precisely the effacement of women Neely objects to in her essay, "Constructing the Subject."²⁵

I am asking the same question as Dubrow: "how can a woman writer create a voice within the Petrarchan tradition, given that it is generally interpreted as deeply masculine and even masculinist?"²⁶ But her answer is very different to mine. She says,

Generalizations about the masculinity of Petrarchism... need to be modulated not only by the activities of women poets on the Continent but also by the workings of that tradition in England and elsewhere, especially by its tendency to elide gender boundaries.²⁷

I am not qualified to enter into a discussion about women writing in languages other than English, except to point out that Jones stresses precisely the qualitative differences and gendered responses I am arguing for in Wroth's work, in the writings

²² *Echoes of Desire*, 53-4.

²³ Which did Wroth's work a great disservice in her own time, since her *Urania* was seen as a poor imitation of his *Arcadia*, as Anne Shaver points out in "A New Woman of Romance" in *Modern Language Studies* 21, part 4 (1991).

²⁴ *Echoes of Desire*, 54.

²⁵ In *ELR* 18.1 (1988).

²⁶ *Echoes of Desire*, 157.

²⁷ *Echoes of Desire*, 158.

of Continental women writers.²⁸ In addition, that I am concerned with English Petrarchanism as I find it being written in the Renaissance period confines my discussion to a particular facet of the discourse of love so popular throughout Europe both before and during the English Renaissance. Most importantly, the construction of English Petrarchanism as a tradition that elides gender boundaries is a problematic one, and one that leads to contradictions in Dubrow's argument as I see it.

Nevertheless, that Wroth's poetry suggests that gender is a constituting factor in Petrarchanism is clear in Dubrow's discussion of the first sonnet, which she says is both typically Petrarchan and also offers a counterdiscourse, "and in so doing signals the agendas of the entire sequence" in ways that "direct our attention to both the power of gender and the gendering of power."²⁹ This would seem to contradict the theoretical discussion of gender elision that has gone before.

In P1, Pamphilia says,

When nights black mantle could most darknes prove,
 And sleep deaths Image did my sences hie
 From knowledg of my self, then thoughts did move
 Swifter then those most swiftnes need require:
 In sleepe, a Chariot drawne by wing'd desire
 I sawe: wher sate bright Venus Queene of love,
 And att her feete her sonne, still adding fire
 To burning hearts which she did hold above,
 Butt one heart flaming more then all the rest
 The goddess held, and putt itt to my brest,
 Deare sonne, now shutt sayd she: thus must wee winn;
 Hee her obey'd, and martir'd my poore hart,
 I, waking hop'd as dreames itt would depart
 Yett since: O mee: a lover I have binn.

The opening sonnet introduces many aspects which are raised throughout the sequence in ways that are significant for Pamphilia's desire. Her love, when it operates to try and help her towards "knowledg of myself," is linked to the traditional function of Petrarchan desire. There are many typically Petrarchan elements to this poem: Cupid and Venus operate as characters whose roles are connected to Pamphilia's desire - here, but not always in the sequence, Venus is the "bright... Queene of love" and Cupid her obedient son whose position "att her feete" emphasises the power relationship. The notion of Pamphilia's "poore" heart as "burning" with the fire of

²⁸ See "Assimilation with a Difference" and *The Currency of Eros*.

²⁹ *Echoes of Desire*, 138.

Petrarchan love is a metaphor that recurs throughout the cycle. Her different condition from other lovers (her heart is “flaming more then all the rest” and is singled out by Venus), and the notion of herself as a martyr, are also both typically Petrarchan. However, Pamphilia uses these images and ideas in ways that mark their difference from typical Petrarchan tropes. This difference is directly linked to the fact that as a woman she has more complicated, more difficult, access to both desire itself and its expression in her poetry.

Dubrow points out the loss of agency presented in the opening poem. “Above all, the emphasis on dreaming places her in a singularly passive position... [H]er encounter with Venus and Cupid casts her as the object of actions performed by others.”³⁰ This passivity, the refusal or inability on Pamphilia’s behalf to be openly active in her assumption of Petrarchan desire, indicates from the sonnet’s inception an important fact about her female desire: it cannot be clearly spoken within Petrarchanism. Dubrow says that the narrative of this first sonnet “is a story of failure,”³¹ which can be directly linked to Pamphilia’s failure to come to terms with herself as an erotically desiring subject in the course of the sequence. Dubrow also points out that this sonnet establishes the importance of binaries in the sequence as a whole, and Dubrow links binary with gender, thus the narrative is structured “around a binary, gendered conflict.”³² The notion of the gendered binary assumes that gender identity relies on a difference between male and female, with each gender term representing an opposite. So binaries consist of opposing terms, where the first term is the primary term, the more powerful of the two. ‘Female’ is thus defined in relation to ‘male,’ and ‘male’ is therefore the privileged term in the binary. The gender ‘norm’ is ‘male,’ and ‘female’ is that which is not male, that which is the Other - the only real gender construct, since ‘male’ is the norm. How can the appearance of binaries, especially expressing “gendered conflict,” in the opening sonnet of the sequence not signal something about the gender differences that inform Wroth’s use of the Petrarchan tradition? And thus, how can it not contradict Dubrow’s notion of gender elision in Petrarchanism as a whole? That Wroth’s Pamphilia may assume “multiple

³⁰ *Echoes of Desire*, 139.

³¹ *Ibid.* Dubrow points out this links the sonnet to many of Shakespeare’s sonnets. She explicates the similarities (145ff).

³² *Ibid.*

and at times contradictory subjectivities,” as Naomi Miller points out³³ does not preclude the fact that these multiple subjectivities are all gendered as female, within and by the masculine tradition within which Wroth writes. Dubrow ultimately denies this gender difference by reading P1 as “a version, though intensified, of the typical helplessness of the Petrarchan speaker.”³⁴ I am not contesting that the disempowered lover is a typical idea in Petrarchanism. Rather, there are added resonances and further implications of a qualitative difference implied when the first English woman Petrarchan lover invokes a notion of passivity to begin the construction of her desiring self. This is corroborated by Dubrow’s reading of Pamphilia to Amphilanthus as a sequence that “plays two types of love against each other”³⁵ - in other words, thematically as well the notion of a binary makes its appearance.

But if Dubrow’s diacritical desire is not useful in explicating desire in Pamphilia to Amphilanthus because the theory fails to account for gender difference as a constituting element of poetic subjectivity, then what is a helpful theoretical framework in which to view Pamphilia’s speaking of her desire? Fineman’s account of “orthodox” “impersonal” desire in Renaissance poetry³⁶ - that is, in terms of his argument, desire as expressed before Shakespeare’s sonnets - may help to account for why Pamphilia’s desire is expressed differently. In ‘traditional’ Renaissance love-poetry, then, desire originates outside the subject, from the source of the Ideal - the beloved. When the object causing the desire is achieved, desire will be satisfied. Thus desire begins outside the self and is imposed on the lover by the perfection of the love object. No matter how powerful or painful the desire is, “in principle the want of such desire can be fully satisfied,” because it is experienced as a need that can be given what it wants. It is an achievable desire. So there is always the potential that desire will be transformed from personal lack to personal bliss. This bliss will be achieved through the joining of subject and object, through the perfect identification of lover and beloved that such desire, and such poetry, constantly strives towards. Most importantly for Wroth’s poetry, consummation depends on the attractive, identificatory power of the Ideal from which the desire originates in the first place.³⁷

³³ Echoes of Desire, 140.

³⁴ Echoes of Desire, 142.

³⁵ Echoes of Desire, 157.

³⁶ Shakespeare’s Perjured Eye, 19.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Also important for Pamphilia to Amphilanthus is the fact that within this formulation of desire, the initial expression of absence - within the poet, as well as the absence of consummation with the beloved - contains the potential for presence to be achieved. This is because the desire is caused in the poet by the external beloved, so the act of reaching for the beloved that is expressed in a poetry of desire is always a gesture towards fulfillment. That Wroth has no such external source present in her poetry is clear - Amphilanthus, the beloved, the cause of desire, is himself largely absent in her poetry even as a constructed subjectivity. He is also a betraying lover, a lover of two, as his name suggests, and thus cannot be relied upon to provide a potential source of stable union. Therefore Pamphilia's desire cannot be expressed as lack always about to be filled. And so her desire does not have the built-in potential of redemption for the lover. In other words, her desire does not have the potential to take her towards a place of unified self, of Ideal perfection. Amphilanthus may still fulfill the structural role of the cause of desire, but by his nature, implied in his name, and by his linguistic and formal absence as a character in the poetry, the desire he initiates is never potentially fulfillable, and is thus different to the typical poetic desire Fineman describes. Fineman's notion of this kind of poetic desire as desire-always-about-to-be-achieved also acknowledges that if the desire ever were achieved, the poetry would have to cease (which is not to say that Fineman suggests fulfillment is in fact possible, although Petrarchan poets need to write as if it were). The external source of desire is the cause for Petrarchan speech in the first place; to consummate and thus fulfill and end the desire would result in silence, since there would be no need to express desire for an ideal object which has already been achieved.

That Amphilanthus is a betraying lover can be seen in P56 where Pamphilia ironically commiserates with his frustration in his relationship with another woman:

Lett grieve as farr be from your dearest brest
 As I doe wish, or in my hands to ease;
 Then shold itt bannist bee, and sweetest rest
 Bee plac'd to give content by love to please,
 Lett those disdaines which on your hart doe seaze
 Doubly returne to bring her soules unrest,
 Since true love will nott, that beelov'd displease
 Or lett least smart to theyr minds bee adrest,
 Butt often times mistakings bee in love,
 Bee they as farr from faulce accusing right,
 And still truthe governe with a constant might,

Soe shall you only wished pleasures prove,
 And as for mee, she that showes you least scorne,
 With all despite, and hate bee her heart torne.

There is a subtle recrimination in Pamphilia's description of how love should operate. Were it up to her, she says, were it "in my hands to ease," then grief "showld... bannist bee, and sweetest rest/ Bee plac'ed to give content by love to please." She would treat Amphilanthus as he is not treating her - her lack of contentment and ease is graphically chronicled throughout the sequence, and her close association with grief is clearly a result of his disdainful and untrue behaviour. In this poem, Amphilanthus is having trouble with another mistress, who is scorning him as he scorns Pamphilia. She invokes for his beloved some of her own medicine: "Lett those disdaines which on your hart doe seaze/ Doubly returne to bring her soules unrest." Ironically, this is precisely what has happened: Amphilanthus, who disdaines Pamphilia and causes her soul's unrest, is having his pain doubly returned upon him. This reflecting effect, which functions like light bouncing off two mirrors or bullets ricocheting off walls, serves to further highlight the differences in Pamphilia and Amphilanthus's situations even as it emphasises the similarities. This is because Amphilanthus will always be a lover of more than one. He does not remain constant to one mistress, so his pain will always be short-lived. Pamphilia's pain is never-ending because it is caused by an inconstant lover to whom she herself is always constant. She suggests, when she tells him that "often times mistakings bee in love" that his mistake is to love anyone other than herself, who would wish "griefe" as "farr from [his] deerest brest" as she could - she would requite him. But by virtue of who he is - a lover of two - Pamphilia will never be certain of his constancy, of being safe in a union with him. He will never be the Ideal object that allows for potential bliss (even if it is bliss-always-about-to-be-achieved, and not actually achievable). He can never represent potential consummation and thus possible ideal unified presence within the poet, or facilitate the lover's achievement of bliss, because he is unreliable and unconstant. This is clear when Pamphilia's ironic treatise on advice to a suffering lover is inverted with the final couplet, as she channels the loathing with which she has been treated violently inwards. "As for mee," she says, then switching to the third person, "With all despite, and hate bee her heart torn." She is emphasising the only possible result of her desire - pain, "despite and hate," with no possibility of cessation, and thus with no possibility

of Ideal union. The third person shift serves to rub salt into her own wounds, as she becomes another “she” in the poem, like Amphilanthus’s current beloved, who is the “her” of line 6. Pamphilia shows her awareness of the fact that she will never be the unique, fulfilled ‘I’ in this relationship, but always just one of the ‘shes’ in Amphilanthus’s life. This is a radical undermining of the Petrarchan lover’s status as primary desiring self. Pamphilia speaks this knowledge, the knowledge that she is a true lover in opposition to both him and his current love interest: “Since true love will nott, that beelov’d displease/Or lett least smart to theyr minds bee adrest.” She suggests that the woman he is chasing does not truly love him since she willingly causes him pain (and by extension, he does not truly love Pamphilia, since he does the same), whereas Pamphilia, “she that showes you least scorne,” must suffer from her true love’s neglect while wanting only the best for him.³⁸

In a later Song on the sequence, Pamphilia once again pinpoints Amphilanthus’s inconstancy as a source of pain; he has “an other ruler”. Her response is not to rail against him, but to conclude with her own hopeless condition:

I, that ame of all most crost
 Having, and that had, have lost,
 May with reason thus complaine
 Since love breeds love, and lovs paine;
 That which I did most desire
 To allay my loving fire
 I may have, yett now must miss
 Since an other ruler is:
 Would that I noe ruler had,
 Or the service nott so bad,
 Then might I, with blis injoy
 That which now my hopes destroy;
 And that wicked pleasure gott
 Brings with itt the sweetest lott:
 I, that must nott taste the best
 Fed must sterve, and restles rest. (P59)

Pamphilia suggests that the condition of fulfillment preceded her pain: she is a lover who “Having, and that had, have lost.” Thus she suggests that there was a time before

³⁸ The last two lines of this poem can also be read as Pamphilia’s response to a third “she,” another woman who is “show[ing Amphilanthus] least scorn.” The curse - “With all despite, and hate bee her heart torn” - is thus Pamphilia’s jealous reaction to one of her beloved’s current lovers. Whether these ambiguous lines are read as referring to Pamphilia, or whether her statement “And as for mee” refers to her opinion on another woman’s just deserts, the effect is the same: his inconstancy is a source of pain.

the sonnet sequence began when Amphilanthus did requite her love, however fickle and transitory his love was. So the beloved becomes the cause of desire in a new way. Instead of imposing a need that always has the potential of being met, Pamphilia's beloved began by meeting her needs and was then unavailable thereafter, presumably by moving on to another "she." So the lack he has created and its possible fulfillment has worked in the opposite direction to staple Petrarchan love - bliss was had and then lost, and will never be had again. The usual pattern, as suggested by Fineman, and as spoken by most Petrarchan poets, is that bliss is almost always about to be had. Also, the always potential union gestured towards in typical Petrarchan poetry assumes that once it is achieved it will be ideal, since it will be with the Ideal. By suggesting she has had emotional (and sexual?) union already (the result of which has been her pain), and with a beloved who is intrinsically false and did not value that union, Pamphilia undermines the notion that union with Amphilanthus can ever be ideal.

Pamphilia calls the enjoyment of her desire "wicked pleasure." She says that "sweetest lott" is achieved through wicked means. This betrays an attitude towards sexual desire that explains her reluctance to openly speak about it, and may be linked to the Renaissance notion that a sexually desiring woman is devouring and uncontrollable. It may also be the result of a female voice speaking within Petrarchanism, a discourse that requires its women to be sexually disdainful. Were she actively to acknowledge desire for physical union, Pamphilia herself would become "wicked," unvertuous, according to the rules of the genre and her society. There is another, almost contradictory explanation that is suggested by the last two lines of the poem. Pamphilia "Fed must sterve" because she cannot "taste the best" of the "sweetest lott" brought by the "wicked pleasure". She concludes the song by emphasising that the reason she is unhappy is not because her desire is immoral, but because she cannot achieve it. She is more preoccupied with her exclusion from love's happiness.

There is a clause early on in the poem which makes excuses for Amphilanthus's behaviour. It is not Amphilanthus's fault that she loves him, but the fault of Pamphilia's "ruler," Love itself. She speaks the desire to be free, not of Amphilanthus, but of Love in its incarnation as an unfair monarch: "Would that I noe ruler had,/ Or the service nott so bad,/ Then might I, with blis injoy/ That which now my hopes destroy." It is clear that Pamphilia's main concern lies not ultimately with

the beloved but with the condition of being in love. This further adds to the fact that Pamphilia's Petrarchan desire does not gesture towards an Ideal beloved. Rather, it is directed inwards, into herself, and in this case onto her condition as a lover. After all, "love breeds... lovs paine". Thus it is love itself which has the potential to fulfill her, which paradoxically must "allay [her] loving fire." Indeed, Love in his (and he is almost always definitively gendered) various carefully detailed incarnations, is far more of a persona in Pamphilia's poetry than her absent, unnamed beloved.

The trope of Petrarchan "loving fire" is a primary image in Wroth's sequence. Typically Petrarchan, Pamphilia constantly conceives of love as a burning fire, from the first sonnet in which she is marked against her will as a lover, where she sees "one hart flaming more then all the rest" in true Petrarchan style. The "fires of love" (P33 l.14) recur throughout the sequence, continually linking the lover to the fire: "[A]dmire [Love]/ sure wee must, or bee borne without fire" (P38 ll.13-14), she says, and, Love "breed[s] those flames whose heat brings joys unrest" (P48 l.4). Thus Pamphilia's desire has the conventional burning, consuming implications. In P15 she tells Night,

I love thy grave, and saddest lookes to see,
Which seems my soule, and dying hart intire,
Like to the ashes of some happy fire
That flam'd in joy, butt quench'd in miserie (ll.4-8)

By emphatically punctuating the word "grave," and linking it to her "dying hart," Pamphilia points out that her fiery love could also be the death of her. This is a typically Petrarchan claim. In this sonnet, however, the threat is about to be actualised - both her "soule" and "hart" are "intire[ly]" expressed through the metaphor of Night's "saddest lookes," through darkness that is the opposite of the light and heat caused by fire. Her subjectivity is not made of fire here but of "the ashes" of the "happy fire" of love. That the fire of love "flamed in joy" suggests it was kindled initially by the prospect of being requited - what else could cause a Petrarchan lover's "joy"? However, her fire has been "quench'd" in the "miserie" in which she now is sunk. This suggests once again that her desire is not an avenue to joy, since it has no possibility of fulfillment; the loving fire of Petrarchan desire becomes used up, burnt out ashes in Pamphilia's Petrarchan heart and soul.

The fire images become more complicated, and more violently sexual, when we remember that in the first sonnet her burning heart is impaled without her leave, significantly in the very poem which lays out the mythical way she became a lover, and thus sets the whole sequence in motion. Venus commands her son to pierce Pamphilia's heart: "Deare sonne, now shutt sayd she: thus must wee winn;/ Hee her obeyed, and martir'd my poore hart" (P1 ll. 11-12). The image of her burning heart pierced by Cupid's arrow expresses her pain and helplessness. Although it is problematic to designate her wholly a victim, she most definitely suggests she would have it otherwise: "I, waking, hop'd as dreames itt would depart/ Yett since: O mee: a lover I have binn" (ll. 13-14). Of course, she has to be a lover to write a Petrarchan sequence, and Wroth chose this conceptualisation of Pamphilia as victim, complicating any perception of Pamphilia as unwilling poet-lover.³⁹ Indeed, in the last sonnet of what seems to be one section of the sequence (since Pamphilia signs her name at the end of it), Pamphilia reaffirms her lover status in a spectacular conflagration of self:

How like a fire doth love increase in mee
 The longer that itt lasts, the stronger still,
 The greater purer, brighter, and doth fill
 Noe eyes with wunder more, then hopes still bee
 Bred in my brest, when fires of love are free
 To use that part to theyr best pleasing will,
 And now impossible itt is to kill
 The heat soe great wher Love his strength doth see.
 Mine eyes can scarce sustaine the flames my heart
 Doth trust in them my passions to impart,
 And languishingly strive to show my love;
 My breath nott able is to breath least part
 Of that increasing feull of my smart;
 Yett love I will till I butt ashes prove. (P55)

This sonnet functions not only as affirmation of the fact that she will always burn with love ("How like a fire doth love increase in mee/ The longer that itt lasts, the stronger still,/ The greater purer, brighter"), but also provides a graphic image of the enormity of her love in the picture of the raging, self-feeding blaze that is burning within her. "[N]ow impossible itt is to kill/ The heat soe great wher Love his strength doth see," she says. The fire metaphor suggests the power and the intensity of not only her love, but of her consuming desire. Although she constantly stresses the necessity for her

³⁹ Pamphilia may be a willing poet, but an unwilling lover. As has been illustrated in the discussion of P59, it is love itself that is the problem for Pamphilia.

eyes to hide their fire, her passion is so great that "Mine eyes can scarce sustaine the flames my heart/ Doth trust in them my passions to impart,/ And languishingly strive to show my love." Wroth has written an intensely desiring speaker in the grips of a "love" of enormous "strength." But the fire image, although conventional, constantly has its dangerous, destructive element stressed throughout the sequence. This is not only because the tremendous intensity of her flaming desire cannot contain the potential for bliss but only for endlessly blazing. In this sonnet, the destructive potential of a raging fire is realised when Pamphilia's determination to remain a lover has only one possible conclusion for her loving self: "love I will till I butt ashes prove." Her subjectivity is offered up on the alter of Love as a kind of a burnt offering. What is typically Petrarchan is the possibility that the fires of desire will meet with requited desire, and that the union that can ensue will soothe the burns. Here, Pamphilia's desire results in a self-immolation in its own fires.

The expression of her love and her burning desire are linked. Although it is overtly her eyes which she says show her internal fire, it is through her poetry that she "impart[s] [her] passion," it is via words that she has "strive[n] to show [her] love." Significantly she says it is her *inability* to express her love that transfers the fire from her heart to her body: "My breath nott able is to breath least part/ Of that increasing feull of my smart/ *Yett* love I will till I butt ashes prove." The typical Petrarchan frustration with words - with "breath" - adequately to convey the lover's emotion takes on a powerful and dangerous image when interlinked with the typical Petrarchan fire. Pamphilia's desire is expressed in conventional terms in a way that emphasises its unconventional nature through intensifying the usual trope of dying for love. The Petrarchan lover may threaten his own end, as indeed Pamphilia does (for example in sonnet P6: "Wish you my end?.../... now I'le seeke itt, since you will nott save" [ll. 11-14]). However, such a threat is usually a ploy to convince the beloved to take pity on the lover. The assumption behind the threat, then, is that if it works, desire will be fulfilled. In Pamphilia's case, however, because of the nature of her imperfect beloved, this can never be the case. The threat of self-consummation by love's fire thus becomes an end in itself, since it cannot lead to mutual consummation of the love. Sonnet P55 affirms Pamphilia's commitment to this newly dangerous Petrarchan fire, even if it results in her burning herself out - a threat with real power in her case.

However, Pamphilia does not ultimately burn out because of the nature of her unmeetable need. This is because there is another reason for the specific nature of her desire, that is once again linked to the fact that she is a female speaker. Pamphilia openly acknowledges her desire in P47, where she is addressing the stars: "Yett envy nott though I on earth beelow/ Injoy a sight which moves in mee more fire;" she says.

I doe confess such beauty breeds desire,
 You shine, and cleerest light on us beestow,
 Yet doth a sight on earth more warmth inspire
 Into my loving soule, his grace to knowe. (ll.2-8)

The terms in which she expresses herself reveal an important facet to her desire. She has to "confess" to the stars that Amphilanthus's physical presence (his "beauty") , elicits a reaction in her. A confession can be extracted through torture. And Pamphilia's loving heart has undergone precisely such a process in the course of bearing "testimony" - another type of confession: "What torments hast thou sufferd while.../... thou tortur'd wert with racks which longing beares/ Pinch'd with desires" (P41 ll.4-7). There is something about Pamphilia's desire which makes her want desperately to keep it hidden. She does not want to have to speak it, but the confession of her desire, the testimony of her love, is forced out of her by her metaphysical companions - by the stars in P47, by longing in P41. It is not to Amphilanthus that she expresses her need, even though he is the "site on earth" that inspires "my loving soule, his grace to knowe." She is not only conjoined to silence by the impossibility of achieving "his grace," but also by the inappropriateness of expressing female desire in the first place.

Pamphilia does express sexual desire, but obliquely. In sonnet P30, she wants Amphilanthus inside her, when she asks him to "Send mee your hart which in mines place shall feed" (l.10). In P5, she lingers on typically Petrarchan aspects of his body, his eyes and lips, to ask the question, "Can firme desire a painefull torment try?" (l.2)

Can winning eyes prove to the hart a sting?
 Or can sweet lips in treason hidden lie?...
 Desires still crost, must unto mischief hie,... (ll.3-7)

The mention of his "winning eyes" and "sweet lips" suggest a typically Petrarchan awareness of his body. There is a kind of self-blazon in Pamphilia's expression of her need for physical contact: "Desire, sight, Eyes, lips, seeke, see, prove and find" (l.12).

However, the danger of doing so is mentioned immediately, as soon as any physical desire is allowed for. Desire may “try” a “painefull torment,” eyes may “sting” the heart of the lover, and “treason” can lie hidden in “sweet lips,” and lips “not loving” prove to be “as poyson” (l. 11). Pamphilia’s biggest problem is in trusting the object of her desire. And this is directly linked to the ways love and lust are constructed in her world. These ideas are explored through the figure of Venus, who is also present in both the first and the last sonnets of the cycle.

Venus is traditionally the goddess of desire, and representative of female lust. As such she can be a complicated and transgressive female figure. In the first sonnet of Pamphilia to Amphilanthus, however, she is the bright Queene of love, ruling with a firm hand her little son Cupid. In P58, she has lost control of the wretched boy:

Say Venus how long have I lov’d and serv’d you heere?...
 ... you have lov’d
 Looke on my paines, and see if you the like have prov’d:
 Remember then you ar the Goddess of desire,
 And that your sacred powre hath touch’d, and felt this fire,
 Parswade thes flames in mee to cease, or them redress
 In mee, poore mee who stormes of love have in excess...
 Command that wayward child your sonn to grant your right,
 And that his bowe, and shafts hee yeeld to your fayre sight
 To you who have the eyes of joye the hart of love,
 And then new hopes may spring that I may pitty move: (ll. 1-16)

In this poem, correlations are drawn between Venus and Pamphilia. They are both actively desiring female lovers, and Pamphilia’s initial tactic is to invoke this similarity of feeling as a plea for empathy: “you have love’d/ Look on my paines, and see if you the like have prov’d.” If Venus will admit such identification with the suffering Pamphilia by remembering her own experiences as a lover, she is asked to “Remember then you ar the Goddess of desire.” Pamphilia asks either to have her desire removed or requited: “Parswade thes flames... to cease, or them redress.” However, the importance of the fact that Venus is the Goddess of desire is dependent upon the initial identification with the lover. Yet, Pamphilia’s carefully politic plea for help takes on an odd twist when, having asked for aid, she commences to praise Venus as though she were a kind of Petrarchan mistress. She has “fayre sight,” “the eyes of joye the hart of love,” and Pamphilia ends up asking Venus for pity as though from an aloof beloved “then new hopes may spring that I may pitty move.” So two separate subject positions are being set up for Venus, and linked in a convoluted way through

the female figure of Pamphilia. The poet can ask for identification not only because they are both lovers, but because they are both women. But in attempting to flatter the woman that is also a Goddess, the lover understandably slips into the rhetoric of Petrarchan devotion - after all, such language is traditionally used to create and praise female forms, goddesses of desire. There is a lesbian dynamic to Pamphilia's address that sits oddly within the masculinist language of Petrarchanism she uses to praise this woman. As a result, a strange convolution in the way Pamphilia can talk about desire results. In asking for pity to be taken on her as a desiring woman, Pamphilia resorts to the creation of the object of desire - the Petrarchan woman. She cannot talk openly of her desire without coming up against the Petrarchan notion of woman as object, and therefore of cause and not recipient of, feelings of desire.

In her advice to Venus about her hyperactive son later on in the poem, Pamphilia gives the impression that the goddess is a slightly careless mother, but one who can be coaxed into controlling her child. As a mother and as a god, she is still the primary power: "Command that wayward child your sonn to grant your right," Pamphilia begs. Pamphilia appeals to Venus's sense of herself as the more powerful of the two love gods. Pamphilia expresses her own desperate situation in terms of her weaker mortal status (thus praising Venus by reminding her of her superior position). She also emphasises that by allowing Cupid to run wild Venus is tolerating his "brag[ging]." Venus is allowing Cupid to publicly relay the story of how he got the better of her. (This is obviously a reference to the story where Cupid used his arrows against his mother, making her fall in love with Mars as a joke. Venus and Mars were caught in the act and chained to the bed by her husband Vulcan, and put on display *in flagrante delecto* for the other gods):

Lett him nott...
 ... mor brag that to you your self a wound hee gave.
 Rule him, or what shall I expect of good to see
 Since hee that hurt you, hee alas may murder mee. (ll. 17-20)

In other sonnets, Venus changes her nature, as desire becomes an emotion similar to Shakespeare's poet's disgusting lust, that "expense of spirit in a waste of shame" (s. 129). In P58, Venus represents the desiring female lover, as well as the Monarch of desire that Pamphilia serves. She is a figure with which Pamphilia can identify. Pamphilia constructs a careful plea to a higher power that presents its

arguments with a highly developed awareness of politics, public image, and issues of power. In sonnet P95, Venus and the desire she represents are both given very different characteristics indeed:

My hart is lost, what can I now expect,
 An ev'ning faire; after a drowsie day?
 (Alas) fond phant'sie this is nott the way
 To cure a morning heart, or salve neglect,
 They who should help, doe mee, and help reject,
 Imbrasing looce desires, and wanton play,
 While wanton bace delights doe beare the swaye,
 And impudencie raignes without respect:
 O Cupid! lett thy mother know her shame
 'T'is time for her to leave this youthfull flame
 Which doth dishoner her, is ages blame,
 And takes away the greatnes of thy name;
 You God of love, she only Queene of lust,
 Yett strives by weakening thee, to bee unjust.

In this sonnet, it is Cupid who is importuned as the more responsible god: "O Cupid! lett thy mother know her shame/ 'T'is time for her to leave this youthfull flame/ Which doth dishoner her." Here Venus is a kind of aging beauty who cannot renounce her sexual attraction, the slightly pathetic older woman who won't leave the boys alone. Again, Pamphilia tries to play the one divinity off against the other, reminding Cupid that his mother's inappropriate behaviour "takes away the greatnes of thy name." This is because two very different domains of desire are allocated to mother and son. "You God of love, she only Queene of lust," says Pamphilia, and then concludes that lust weakens love in an unjust manner. Desire in this sonnet is sharply split, given two natures, where physical desire is designated the weaker, inappropriate, loose, wanton, base, impudent, dishonouring, unjust, and female emotion. This correlates exactly with Shakespeare's "lust/ Is perjured, murd'rous, bloody, full of blame,/ Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust" (s. 129). The reason lust is so unjust in Pamphilia's poem is because Venus allows lust to masquerade as love. If that is the case, it is no wonder Pamphilia is so circumspect with her love, since to enter into the actively sexually desiring world is to risk being betrayed, lied to, used; being told you are loved in return, when in fact you are only lusted after, and will be discarded, since as Pamphilia says elsewhere, only true love is constant (P94). In contrast, this is a world where "Those who should help, doe... help reject," a world where "wanton bace delights doe beare the swaye,/ And impudencie raignes without respect." In differentiating

between two kinds of desire, her true, constant desire and the imbrasing looce wanton base desires of those around her, Pamphilia sets up a number of binaries: youth/ age, Cupid/ Venus, God/ Queen, love/ lust. Except for the temporal opposition of youth and age, these binaries correspond to notions of sexual hierarchies in the Renaissance: superior male power is capable of true love, while lesser female characteristics allow for baser, irrational feelings. If Pamphilia were to actively speak her desire, she would be branded a wanton, since female desire in this formulation belongs to the realm of the lustful, base, female, Venus.

The nature of the context in which desire exists, this world of deception and lust, is explicated in P94, where Pamphilia's advice to young lovers suggests the treatment she herself has suffered at the hands of her unfaithful beloved:

Lovers learne to speake butt truthe
 Sweare nott, and your othes forgoe...
 Think itt sacrilidg to breake
 What you promise shall in love...
 Doe nott think itt glory is
 To intisce, and then deseave...
 For if worthles to bee priz'd
 Why att first will you itt move
 And if worthy, why dispis'd
 You can nott sweare, and ly, and love.

Love is a fashionable game - "for a fashion mov'd" (l.26) - and is thus not to be trusted. If this were not the case, there would be no need for Pamphilia's corrective advice. This long poem is a didactic lecture on how to behave, and behind Pamphilia's address is the sense, corroborated in the rest of the sequence, that she herself has been part of a relationship that was presented to her as true love but was in fact the opposite of everything she states is necessary for love. She says lovers should *learn* to speak truth (an interesting expression, implying that deception comes more naturally); she was lied to. She warns against glorying in "intisc[ing]" and then "deseaving," against not prizing what you have won; she was victim of such a ploy and was not appreciated as a long-term gain. Most importantly, Pamphilia's definition of love is founded on sincerity: "You can nott sweare, and ly, and love." She continues, speaking of deception:

Fly this folly, and returne
 Unto truth in love, and try,
 None butt Martirs hapy burne

More shamefull ends they have that lye. (ll.33-36)

When she cannot trust what she is told, when desire splits into mutually exclusive truthful love and deceptive lust, when as a woman she cannot afford to be tricked into playing a game of love whose rules keep changing, it is no wonder that Pamphilia is unhappy with her Petrarchan desire: "Burne, and yett freeze, better in hell to bee" (P19 l.14).

So Pamphilia cannot rely on her Petrarchan desire for bliss, or safely express herself as a desiring woman. She cannot speak the need for physical union as Sidney's Astrophil, Shakespeare's Will, Donne's poet can. The only other alternative open to Pamphilia if she cannot express a desiring self is to give up her desire - to choose chastity, and it is ultimately this 'virtue' to which she pledges herself. "Wroth... narrows the meaning of the term 'virtue' to absence of sexual intercourse,"⁴⁰ thus making Pamphilia's virtue correspond to the dominant notion of female virtue, chastity. Pamphilia chooses chastity in a way that elevates her love for Amphilanthus from the realm of lust she has outlined to the realm of true, and thus constant, love. Constancy becomes the solution to Pamphilia's Petrarchan dilemmas. And since her desire for Amphilanthus is both unsafe and unfulfillable, to pledge constancy to an absent beloved is to choose chastity and renounce desire.⁴¹ However, it is desire that enables her Petrarchan poetry, since she is writing in a discourse of desire after all. To banish desire, to mediate chastity through constancy, is to be left with silence. And the silent woman, whose desire is controlled and controllable, is the woman that Renaissance dominant ideology wants to create.

⁴⁰ Oppositional Voices, 143. This is seen by Krontiris as a strategy of adaptation, an example of the way that women writers redefined the language they had inherited and thus appropriated it to their uses.

⁴¹ But does she definitively choose constancy/chastity and completely renounce desire in the final sonnet? May Nelson Paulissen's reading, in The Love Sonnets of Lady Mary Wroth: A Critical Introduction (Salzburg: Universitat Salzburg, 1982), complicates my point. Believing Wroth wrote for a coterie and thus includes in her sonnets many oblique references to private jokes and individual people, Paulissen sees evidence for naming Wroth's lover "Will." Thus, the last sonnet's reference to "Never Will remove" is an affirmation of a real-life love affair (209), and conceivably, a commitment to desire, since "Will" in Shakespeare's sonnets often refers to sexual will. The issue of Wroth's coterie status aside (which I find problematic, not least because Paulissen is over-simplistic in assuming the existence of a coterie that seems to include everyone who wrote at the time regardless of class or connections, and this reading also misses the extreme isolation and absence I find at the heart of the sonnets), this suggestion undermines the link between constancy, that is, chastity, and silence.

Pamphilia prepares for the silence to which the renunciation of her Petrarchan desire force her Petrarchan poetry, by presenting constancy as the literally most natural state. This is suggested in P73, where Pamphilia's love is tied into the natural seasonal cycles: "The spring time of my first loving/ Finds yett noe winter of removing" (*ll.* 1-2). She writes a lesson for constancy out of the natural patterns of the world: "The trees may teach us loves remaining/ Who suffer chang with little paining... Those that doe love butt for a season/ Doe faulcefy both love, and reason" (*ll.* 5-14). In a witty twist, Pamphilia uses this logic to explain away Amphilanthus's inconstancy even as she reaffirms her commitment to him:

As Birds by silence show theyr mourning
In colde, yett sing att springs returning
Soe may love nipt awhile decrease
Butt as the sommer soone increase...
... though the heat awhile decrease
Itt with the sommer may increase
And since the spring time of my loving
Found never winter of removing. (*ll.* 9-22)

If constancy is a virtue found in a summer country landscape (an ideal pastoral setting), it belongs to a realm separate to the court, with all its associations of lust and lies. A direct link between a pastoral landscape and constancy is forged in P60. This is a song about a "faythfull sheapheard" (*l.* 2) who is likened to "a Princese" (*l.* 3). In other words, Pamphilia appears in this song as an oblique point of comparison (in the *Urania* she is a princess). Like the princess, "Constancy" is the shepherd's "chiefe delighting" (*l.* 11), and, like her, he "lov'd well butt was nott lov'd/ Though with scorne, and grieve opressed/ Could nott yett to chang be mov'd" (*ll.* 18-20). This poem would seem to be a perfect example of Dubrow's point - gender boundaries are elided, with the female princess and the male shepard occupying exactly the same space of constancy, and having the same experience of scorn and grief as a result. Notably, however, this elision occurs not in a Petrarchan sonnet but within the pastoral genre, whose rules typically conflate other sites of identity, such as class. This happens when country characters represent nobility (in satiric aspects of pastoral) or literally become, are revealed as, nobility in the course of the narrative. Thus this song functions to establish constancy as belonging to a world outside the game-obsessed court, as well as pointing out that it is not easily valued anywhere. So, even as it is

being constructed, the naturalising of constancy is presented as a problematic solution to unrequited desire.

In P101, Pamphilia says there is no end or recourse to her desire:

No time, noe roome, noe thought, or writing can
 Give rest, or quiett to my loving hart...
 Yett would I nott (deere love) thou shouldst depart
 Butt lett my passions as they first began
 Rule, wounde, and please (ll. 1-7)

In this sonnet, just two before the close of the cycle, Pamphilia seems to be committing herself not only to loving in a burning, desiring Petrarchan manner - "lett my passions as they first began/ Rule" - but to writing about it - "lett my passions/... please." However this notion of the writing, desiring self is retracted two sonnets later, at the close of the sequence. Constancy, with its concomitant links to chastity, is finally chosen, after being discussed as an option throughout the sequence. A further implication of this choice is that Pamphilia renounces her writing. In so doing she ends her identity as a Petrarchan lover and thus must end her Petrarchan sequence. In the last poem of the cycle she says:

My muse now haply, lay thy self to rest,
 Sleepe in the quiett of a faithfull love,
 Write you noe more, butt lett thes phant'sies move
 Some other harts, wake nott to new unrest,
 Butt if you study, bee those thoughts adrest
 To truth, which shall eternall goodnes prove;
 Injoying of true joye, the most, and best,
 The endles gaine which never will remove;
 Leave the discourse of Venus, and her sunn
 To young beeginers, and theyr brains inspire
 With storys of great love, and from that fire
 Gett heat to write the fortunes they have wunn,
 And thus leave off, what's past shoves you can love,
 Now lett your constancy your honor prove,
 Pamphilia. (P103)

In Petrarchanism, there is always a sense of display implicit in writing, in love, and in desire. The notion of display, as well as the discourse that facilitates it, disappears with an avowal to constancy, which is also an avowal to chastity. This must be, because to vow eternal devotion to a textually and emotionally absent, inconstant lover, while at the same time renouncing desire as a burning force, is to choose celibacy. When Pamphilia commands her muse to "Sleepe in the quiett of a faithfull

love,” that is, not to participate actively in the noise of a desiring Petrarchan love, the concomitant command is “Write you noe more.” It is not surprising that she chooses chastity and silence given the way the game of love is played in her world - and the way love is viewed in the sonnets echoes the goings on of the world of the *Urania*.⁴² The sense of deception implicit in courtly love as it has been described in the sonnets also ironises Pamphilia’s legacy of “the discourse of Venus, and her sunn” (especially since it is not clear exactly what this discourse is, how it is divided between the goddess of lust who is also the bright queen of love, and her alternately obedient and mischievous son) to the “young beegeners.” The nobility of what they are likely to do with her discourse of love remains in doubt.

Pamphilia renounces both Cupid and his mother, she “Leave[s] the discourse of Venus and her sunn,” and therefore erotic desire and Petrarchan love. Since these kinds of desire have failed her in any case, her noble handing over of the discourse is an attempt to re-empower herself. “Pamphilia... turns the humiliating position of the abandoned woman into proof of her heroic constancy.”⁴³

Since the Muse is to “Sleepe in... quiet/.../ And thus leave off,” a sense of quietness (in both senses) and peacefulness is expressed in this sonnet- the quiet that goes with silence, and with lack of activity.⁴⁴ Indeed, Dubrow sees the sonnet as expressing a similar passivity to P1.⁴⁵ Once before Pamphilia has linked silence to her love. In P36, Pamphilia says, “I... felt that love/ Indeed was best, when I did least itt move.” The few moments in the sequence where Pamphilia achieves calmness, her writing ceases, as here, where the thought that love is best felt when least expressed ends sonnet P36.

Pamphilia’s willing assumption of chastity as an alternative to both desire and writing must resonate in a Renaissance context. Pamphilia “shows to how great an

⁴² See “A New Woman of Romance.”

⁴³ *The Currency of Eros*, 141.

⁴⁴ In contrast to the quietness of the final sonnet, which renounces desire, is the sense of urgency and overwhelming, rushing power associated with Pamphilia’s loving, desiring state throughout the sequence. In P37, Pamphilia addresses Time: “How fast thou fliest, O Time, on loves swift wings/ To hopes of joy, that flatters our desire/ Which to a lover, still, contentment brings!” (ll.1-3). In P51, the idea of “hast” is directly linked to the image of an overflowing, rushing spring river, a perfect metaphor for desire. In P60, Pamphilia speaks of a “Princesse whose thoughts sliding/ Like swift rivers never rest” (P60 ll.3-4). Also, the image of Pamphilia’s thoughts moving “swifter then those most swiftnes need require” (P1 l.4) is linked to the dream in which she acquires her burning, desiring Petrarchan heart in the first place.

⁴⁵ *Echoes of Desire*, 139.

extent her author appears to have internalized the Renaissance ideal of womanhood with its insistence on chastity above all, then silence and obedience."⁴⁶ However, Pamphilia is not only the victim of an internalised ideal. She is also aware of her choices, and of the implications of choosing other than she has. Shaver suggests that Pamphilia

subverts the ideal... Pamphilia's chastity is presented as neither religious nor dynastic, but rather as synonymous with her constant love for... Amphilanthus. Her choices are virginity or marriage; as she will not marry anyone but Amphilanthus, and he remains elusive, virginity is a given.⁴⁷

So in swearing constancy to Amphilanthus, absent as he may be, Pamphilia is asserting her right to the implications of her decision to love in the first place. She will not be swayed into loving another. Since her Petrarchan subject must by definition be eternally true to the beloved, this determination to love Amphilanthus is also a determination to remain Pamphilia. So what for feminism is the apparently unsatisfactory choice of constancy/chastity is also a source of empowerment, a determination to retain the right to self-definition. Shaver shows that Pamphilia, like all Petrarchan lovers, is primarily concerned with self-definition (even if in her case the usual generic strategies fail her and she is forced to look inward as a result), and she must be true to the constancy and concomitant chastity by which she defines herself. "Chastity, although it is enjoined on women by both religious and secular patriarchal society, can also be a practise that intelligent women embrace willingly, not simply out of resignation."⁴⁸ So Pamphilia *has* assimilated the ideology of what being a perfect Lady entails, but at the same time it is her only source of self-empowerment. The only way she can remain true to herself and be concerned with and for herself is to resist being a sexual conquest or being made to enter into the marriage market, thus becoming a man's property - and a man other than Amphilanthus. Her constancy and chastity, although the ultimate source of her silence, does not wholly make her a victim of her society's ideological constraints. It is also the only way in which she resists ownership by another. The sequence ends with her name, which is literally the final word. Thus a sense of her personal identity concludes the sonnet sequence.

⁴⁶ "A New Woman of Romance," 63.

⁴⁷ "A New Woman of Romance," 64.

⁴⁸ "A New Woman of Romance," 65.

Pamphilia is aware that her personal identity is in a real sense all she has. This is seen early on in the sequence, in sonnet P21:

Then kinde thought my phant'sie guide
 Lett mee never haples slide;
 Still maintaine thy force in mee,
 Let mee thinking still bee free:
 Nor leave thy might untill my death
 Butt lett mee thinking yeeld up breath. (ll.19-24)

It is her ability to think for herself that makes her "free," and it is this freedom that Pamphilia commits herself to, as much as she commits to her unsatisfactory love: "lett mee thinking yeeld up breath" has the same firm finality as "lett your constancy your honor prove."

So Pamphilia's Petrarchan desire cannot create a need that is always potentially fulfillable. This is due to the nature of her unideal, absent beloved, and because female desire cannot easily be expressed within a discourse that has no room for female eroticism to be a source of self-definition. In addition, the expression of her desire is potentially dangerous in a world of courtly love games, a world where a woman's primary virtue is her chastity, so that to make a bad decision - to be fooled in the game of love - has far direr consequences for a woman than for a man. She cannot transfer her defining point of differentiation to rival poets, since as a woman she has no similar female poets with which to compete, and male poet-rivals hardly appear in the sequence. This absence of a discourse with other poets is a direct result of both Wroth's and Pamphilia's gender, and explains another reason why Pamphilia's desire cannot create a need that is always potentially fulfillable.

As a woman, Wroth had far less access to the public attention that could result from the circulation of manuscripts which was so much a part of the lives and work of male poets, as Marotti has pointed out in John Donne: Coterie Poet.⁴⁹ Indeed, the political desire of Petrarchan discourse plays an important part in its expressions of erotic desire. If the Petrarchan poet can never be fulfilled erotically, he can be fulfilled socially and politically. The public nature of Petrarchan discourse provides an alternative site onto which erotic desire can be displaced. Whether the poet is addressing a single person - his beloved - or is demonstrating his poetic skill to

⁴⁹ Arthur Marotti, John Donne: Coterie Poet (London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986).

a coterie of friends and readers, he can fulfill the desire for achievement that he cannot attain erotically, through the achievement of successful poetic performance. Whether the desire expressed for the beloved exists in his 'real' world, in the world outside his poetry, or whether the erotic desire is purely a literary expression, it is still an expression of skill. The public and political affirmation this skill could bring a Renaissance poet was as much a source of desire as any Ideal beloved. The erotic desire that fuels the poetry may be unattainable if the poetry is to continue; the desire to demonstrate poetic skill publicly was certain achievable, as were the personal, poetic or political, public rewards that such a shared demonstration of wit and ability could bring. However, in the social context of the Renaissance, erotic desire can only be displaced publicly into political and poetic achievement if the poet is a man. The rules governing the appropriate behaviour for women forbore the public circulation that is the starting point for public acclaim in a coterie or courtly situation. We cannot know for certain who saw Wroth's poetry in manuscript form, but the events of her life bear witness to the fact that it was considered inappropriate for her work to have been published. In a very real sense, then, Wroth cannot circulate as a poet, and thus the Petrarchan source of truly possible achievement of desire is denied her. Wroth cannot displace her private-erotic humiliation onto a space of public acclaim that will compensate for her erotic desire, that will allow for the deferral of erotic disappointment. She can only displace her humiliation by turning her constancy into a source of heroic denunciation of Petrarchan desire. This results in a denunciation of Petrarchan speech as well, since Petrarchan speech must always be desiring speech, the speech of desire, as well as the speech that desires to speak publicly. The realities of Renaissance gender politics thus impact on the Petrarchan desire expressed in Wroth's poetry, because Wroth's access to the rights and rewards of successful performance, indeed, to any public performance at all, is very different to her contemporary male poets'. Pamphilia may choose not to circulate, as Masten describes,⁵⁰ but if she does it is a false choice, since in many respects she would not have been allowed to. Both her, and her creator's, access to circulation was circumscribed.

⁵⁰ In "Shall I turne blabb?"

As Dubrow rightly points out, there are many aspects of Pamphilia's poetry that are typically Petrarchan - isolation, dissatisfaction with words, burning with the fire of love. But there is a difference in the way such generic tropes are expressed that is linked to the female nature of Pamphilia's Petrarchan desire. She must ultimately choose to renounce desire, and therefore to renounce the discourse of desire, an act which forces her Petrarchan poetry to cease, if she is to retain control over herself as a subject. "The all-encompassing melancholy of Wroth's poems seems to grow from wider cultural disillusion than the Petrarchan convention affords... her speech is unusually charged with rejection and frustration that go beyond the courtly Petrarchan situation."⁵¹ This frustration results because desire cannot be spoken in the traditional Petrarchan way by Pamphilia, and because desire cannot be deferred to the traditional public affirmation of poetic skill by Wroth.

Ultimately, Wroth's Petrarchan poetry displays the difficulties for a woman speaker expressing desire within a traditionally masculinist discourse, within a culture that has a double standard for desiring men and desiring women. "A woman writer in a patriarchal culture must develop strategies against her own internalization of the oppressive ideologies around her; for when she experiences conflict between her desire and what she has been taught is right and proper, she must try to accommodate both desire and the ideology that denies it. Such strategies - whether consciously or unconsciously used - profoundly determine the shape of a woman's literary style."⁵² Wroth's social situation also forces her poet to resort to different tactics; her Petrarchan erotic desire cannot displace its frustrations and failures onto possible socio-political success, because Wroth as a woman has limited access to the public display whose possible results are as much a part of most English Petrarchan poets' desire as the achievement of the beloved, and thus, the Self.

⁵¹ *English Poetry of the Sixteenth Century*, 267-8.

⁵² *Oppositional Voices*, 22-3.

Chapter 5: “You who are a... God”: Watching Eyes Watching Eyes like the Sun

By seeing me You enable me to see You, You who are a hidden God... To see you is
but to be seen by You... You tend to show Yourself to those who seek You, for
Your eyes are open and never turn away from them...”
Nicholas Cusanus, Renaissance Philosopher, *Traite de la Vision de Dieu*¹

Eyes are a dominant motif in Pamphilia to Amphilanthus. Pamphilia talks about and to the eyes of her beloved, her own eyes, and the eyes of other watchers in the world of her poems. However, the ways in which the eye imagery functions in Wroth’s sonnet sequence marks a difference in Pamphilia’s situation as a Petrarchan poet. In this chapter I will first discuss the eye as a symbol in the Renaissance, and, by contextualising the notion of the gaze for both Wroth and Pamphilia, I will attempt to show the nature of the gendered difference in Wroth’s poetry when the first English female poet-lover makes use of the philosophical and visual nature of the eye image. The eyes of others play an equally important role in this sonnet sequence as the eyes of the beloved, and the light cast by watching eyes, as well as the light of Amphilanthus’s gaze, only emphasise Pamphilia’s internal darkness. The unreliable nature of her beloved’s gaze, the danger inherent in its attractive brightness, and the ever-present, ever-watchful eyes of those around her, serve as constant reminder that the act of gazing on, and being gazed upon by, the beloved is not uncomplicatedly allowed to a female Renaissance poet.

“[T]he eye is everywhere present in the enterprises of the Renaissance,”² from philosophy to painting to love poetry. Indeed, the image of the eye often combines poetic, religious, Neoplatonic, psychological and philosophic nuances.³ It is not only the eye itself as a visual symbol, but the notions of gazing and being gazed upon that are important to a culture of visibility. This concern with sight is linked to a desire to strive towards essential unity, in the case of Petrarchan sonnets, a unity of self. Fineman details how Shakespeare’s sonnets, and the sonnet tradition as a whole, use praise as a means of creating a reflexive circle; that is to say, praise poetry is concerned with itself as poetry, and with reflecting the praise it directs towards its

¹ Qtd. Marc Bensimon, “The significance of eye imagery in the Renaissance from Bosch to Montaigne” in *Yale French Studies* 47 (1972), 279.

² *Ibid.*

³ See “The significance of eye imagery in the Renaissance.”

epideictic object back on itself, and on its poet.⁴ Similarly, Marc Bensimon shows how in the Renaissance throughout Europe “visuality takes on such importance that no artistic, literary, intellectual, or even musical activity can be discussed without reference to it.”⁵ Indeed, because of the rich and varied associations with the eye image in the period, the visuality trope becomes a symbol, which further contributes towards its drive for unity since “the symbolic world, in its search for totality, is a unity and never a duality.”⁶ This transformation from image to symbol is precisely what happens when the image of the gazing eye, either the poet’s or the beloved’s, takes on meaning as a path to Grace, and in so doing, to the self. Bensimon says of the prevalent image of the gaze in love poetry that, “This activity is usually rather narcissistic, for the poet does not really see the lady whose charms he supposedly wishes to praise.”⁷ This is because of the self-definitional, reflexively reflecting nature of Petrarchan poetry, where the symbol of the beloved’s eyes serves to shed irradiating light on the poet, and thus, traditionally, brings him closer to himself. So the poet’s ‘I’ is always linked to the notion of his/her ‘eye,’⁸ and indeed, the trope of a mirror - of the lover reflecting self off beloved - relies implicitly on a notion of light by which to see such a process. The act of self-mirroring can only take place in the light of love.

Castiglione also explicates the connection between viewing and self-determination. In terms of Neoplatonism, virtue is always ultimately the desire for the good. Good seeks beauty, and, as Castiglione’s Bembo says, “love is naught but a desire to enjoy beauty.” Thus, “love begins when ‘beauty first attracts the eyes of men,... impresses itself upon the soul, and stirs and delights her with new sweetness throughout, and by kindling her it excites in her a desire for its own self.’”⁹ So the notion of the loving fire - that which “kindles” the soul - is linked directly to the act of gazing on the beautiful beloved, whose beauty initiates love, bespeaks true Goodness, and enables a desire for beauty (and thus goodness) in the gazer. The beloved also facilitates the achievement of such Grace within the poet-lover. It is the poet’s gazing

⁴ Shakespeare’s Perjured Eye, see especially chapter two.

⁵ “The significance of eye imagery in the Renaissance,” 266.

⁶ Andre Stegman, “Richness and Ambivalence of the symbol in the Renaissance” in Yale French Studies 47 (1972), 13.

⁷ “The significance of eye imagery in the Renaissance,” 279.

⁸ See Shakespeare’s Perjured Eye, chapter one.

⁹ The Love Sonnets of Lady Mary Wroth, 106-7.

on the beloved in the first place that causes him/her to fall in love, and it is the beloved's eyes - as shooting out Cupid's darts, as shining glorious light out upon the poet - that contribute to this process as well. The eyes are the cause of love, the means of salvation, and the pathway to true goodness and to self-achievement, that is, the achievement of goodness *in* the self and the achievement *of* the self.

The most obvious source of light, with associations of ultimate life-giving power, and one of the commonest praise tropes in Petrarchan poetry, is the sun. The image of the sun becomes symbolically the source of a purest light that reveals Divine Truth: Calvin, in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, wrote:

[I]f we contemplate the things around us, we are convinced that our sight is firm and clear; but, should we raise our eyes straight towards the sun, the power exercised by our sight on this earth is confounded and dazzled by such a great light... what pleased us before under the color of justice will seem to be soiled with very great iniquity; ... what deceived us miraculously in Wisdom's shadow will show itself to be extreme madness.¹⁰

If the sun is the source of holy knowledge because of its light-giving properties, there are implications for images of darkness, and by association, of sleep, such as are common to Wroth's poetry. If the Sun represents Truth and Light, then images of darkness, often with the concomitant activity of sleep, represent not only the unknown, but are often "synonymous with death."¹¹ It is not only a physical death that is implied in such images. If the Sun has spiritual connotations, then its dark opposite must have as well. Certainly in Wroth's poetry, a particular relationship is developed between Amphilanthus as the beloved, and the sun, in typical Petrarchan ways. However, the implications of the sun-light topos are often quite different in *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* to the way the Petrarchan poet had usually used the visuality symbol.

P1 begins in darkness: "When nights black mantle could most darknes prove" (l.1) - and it is in the context of such a darkened self, a self in darkness and in the darkness of not knowing itself, that Pamphilia assumes her lover status: "sleepe deaths Image did my senses hier/ From knowledge of my self" (ll.2-3). This lack of knowledge and lack of light is metaphorically linked to death, which is the opposite state to that caused by the sun's life-sustaining light. This is emphasised by the repetition throughout the sequence of the fact that the sun-gaze of Amphilanthus is

¹⁰ "The significance of eye imagery in the Renaissance," 273.

¹¹ "The significance of eye imagery in the Renaissance," 276.

designated her food, without which she will die. Here, in the opening poem, Venus is the “bright... Queene of love” (l.6). Love is the source of brightness, and thus of vision as well as of life. I will examine first, the ways in which Amphilanthus’s eyes are addressed and thus constituted by the poetry, and the concomitant implications for Pamphilia. Then I will explore the ways in which Pamphilia speaks to her own eyes, and finally, the role that the eyes of others play in Pamphilia’s topos of visuality. I hope this will provide a clear sense of the differences in Wroth’s poetry’s use of the eye symbol, and of the reasons for these differences, reasons linked to Pamphilia’s context, and the specific expectations of a woman in this context. I will make reference to Shakespeare’s sonnets in an attempt to clarify these points.

Brightness and darkness are traditional Petrarchan tropes that carry connotations of power and empowerment that can be intertwined with notions of gender. Lorna Hutson shows how the association of the young man’s eyes in Shakespeare’s sonnets is linked to his power as a patron and as a man. Thus that the young man is fair - light, and thus just - and is often likened to the sun has to do with “relocating masculine virtue and honour in the power to authorize meaning.”¹² This is why the lady’s eyes are nothing like the sun, since the sun represents male power, and is linked to the authority of the male reader to irradiate his textual position. Exactly like Calvin’s divine sun, then, the male “beholder... exercised virtue as a medium of knowledge, and the patron, in his exalted position as potential governor of society, exercised more than most, having eyes like the sun, to bring knowledge to the inferior sight of others.”¹³

Shakespeare is a good comparison to Wroth on this point. Both Wroth’s and Shakespeare’s poets are similarly disempowered within a courtly context - he in terms of class, she of gender. Both are aware of being looked at in the world of the court within their sonnet sequences, and this condition of being looked at becomes an issue in their often counterdiscursive Petrarchan poetry. Shakespeare’s poet is “As an unperfect actor on the stage/ Who with his fear is put besides his part” (s.23), and Pamphilia “should nott have bin made this stage of woe/ Wher sad disasters have theyr open show” (P48 ll. 13-14). Shakespeare’s poet “all alone beweepe[s] [his] outcast

¹² “Why the Lady’s eyes are nothing like the sun” in *New Feminist Discourses*, 154.

¹³ “Why the Lady’s eyes are nothing like the sun,” 160.

state" (s.29), and Pamphilia is "a bannish'd creature" who can have no "pleasures.../ In all the pastimes that invented arr" (P44 // 1-2). Furthermore, Shakespeare's poet's two beloveds have particular relationships with the sun image he assigns them, as Amphilanthus has a specific, visual power that is linked to the power of the sun.

Before beginning an exploration of these statements, it is necessary to briefly consider the issue of Wroth's conditions of writing, since this chapter will be concerned in part with the politics of others' gazes. Paulissen sees Wroth as a coterie poet, but what is significant here is that she sees the coterie condition as related to the notion of restricted viewing: "Castiglione's warning to courtiers against submitting their writings to vulgar eyes [through publication], was, in effect, a *raison d'être* for the formation of select circles such as Lady Mary's [*sic*]." ¹⁴ Thus only certain eyes can be allowed to view the results of a certain kind of interaction, which produces a certain kind of poetry. This realisation, the knowledge that specific gazes are imbued with important implications for the gazee, depending on the attitudes of those doing the looking and how they interpret what they see, is also explicated by Pamphilia. Who gazes on whom, and for what purpose, is a central theme in Wroth's sonnets, and accounts for Pamphilia's need to hide her own gazes. Although without mobilising all the implications of a coterie, Roberts believes that the manuscript of Pamphilia to Amphilanthus circulated first amongst Wroth's friends, ¹⁵ which would seem to imply, if not a structured circle, at least some kind of poetic community, an audience that could always be kept in the writer's mind behind the act of writing the sonnets. In contrast, Jones says of Wroth (and Gaspara Stampa, to whose work Wroth's is compared), that "Stampa and Wroth *were* solitary as love poets: they wrote as exceptional women rather than as members of a group. Symptomatically, their alter egos engage in frustrated monologues rather than coterie dialogues." ¹⁶ The question ultimately is, how public were the sonnets before their publication? How public were they ever intended to be? Were they written for the public gaze? And concomitantly, how do we account for their publication? Or, as Masten puts it,

What... are we to make of the sonnets' appearance in this cryptically published, ambiguously public volume?... To insert oneself into Petrarchan discourse in order to register one's subject position and (simultaneously) to keep private the

¹⁴ The Love Sonnets of Lady Mary Wroth, 105-6.

¹⁵ The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth, 42.

¹⁶ The Currency of Eros, 143.

texts which construct that position is at best a mute gesture... Wroth as a woman-writer must resist publication as a form of male trafficking, yet that resistance can only register if it is made public.¹⁷

Masten, I think, is talking of the unambiguously public world of court life. Wroth making her sonnets "public" by showing them to a few friends is not the same kind of publicity for which Petrarchan poetry generally was aiming. So to be able to safely determine if what we register in the poems is a conscious refusal to circulate, or the predicament of being caught in the paradox outlined by Masten, we would need to know the conditions under which the poetry was written. This cannot be certain without the discovery of further documentation about Wroth's life. What we can turn to is the poetry itself, and the ways in which it registers the tension between the private and the public in Petrarchan poetry's nature - that is, love poetry written in a Petrarchan context is a public expression of ostensibly private thoughts, because love is a personal emotion. Love poetry at least seems to be concerned with the poet's loving self (although it may also be expressing other kinds of desires), and in terms of the workings of Petrarchan poetry in particular, it is the poet's self that is being sought for and formulated within the poetry of reflexive reflection. In this way, then, the poetry can be called private, since it is concerned with the self in various ways. Pamphilia accounts for her poetry in terms that want to escape the public aspect of Petrarchan writing. Instead, she says she writes as a private activity, to ease the pain of her grief which is caused by being a betrayed lover:

Led by the powre of grieffe, to waylings brought
By faulce consiete of change fall'ne on my part,
I seeke for some smale ease by lines, which bought
Increase the paine; grieffe is nott cur'd by art. (P9 // 1-4)

Pamphilia says that the writing down of her private emotion "Increase[s] the paine." This could be because to attempt to write privately within a Petrarchan discourse is indeed an untenable task, the paradox of the Petrarchan lover who does not wish to be gazed upon. Private "grieffe is nott cur'd by" Petrarchan "art." Pamphilia is precisely this paradoxical Petrarchan lover, a lover who constantly directs her gaze internally. The poetry repeatedly expresses a wish to remain private within its own courtly world. Pamphilia, although obsessively returning to the image of the eye, equally

¹⁷ "Shall I turne blabb?," 83.

obsessively registers a desire not to be seen, and not to be seen to see. This heartfelt desire, emphatically expressed throughout the sonnets with a sense of impending danger to its speaker if she is ever caught gazing, sits oddly with the fact that Petrarchanism is such a public genre. The reason for this twist in the usual topos can once again be accounted for by the fact that Pamphilia is a woman, writing in a traditionally masculinist discourse, and, more importantly, in the context of Renaissance culture's prohibitions on female agency.

The reason why Pamphilia needs to hide her gaze at times even more than she needs the gaze of her beloved, can be suggested by what *The Ladies Dictionary*, a seventeenth-century advice book, has to say about eyes:

Eyes are the casements of the body, and many times by standing too much open, let in things hurtful to the mind... we may see too much, if we be not careful in governing our eyes... Therefore, ladies, to prevent the malady... you must keep your eyes within compass, from wandering as much as possible... Consult chastity and modesty... Give no occasion then ladies for any to tax your eyes with any thing that is not modest... and allowable... let your mind be upon them [your eyes], to keep them in their due bounds, lest becoming a prey to others, you are enslaved, or if you make a prey of others, your conquest may however prove very troublesome and uneasy to you.¹⁸

"Ladies" are prohibited from access to any kind of active gaze. Indeed, even passively, they "may see too much." Pamphilia is very aware of this prohibition against gazing, the public need for a woman to control her eyes, and how suspiciously a woman could be watched. In P66 she says, "Cruell suspition, O! bee now att rest.../But to my end thou fly'st with greedy eye,/Seeking to bring grieve by bace jealousy,/O in how strang a cage ame I kept in?" (ll. 1-11). This question is full of resonances - the strange cage of Petrarchan love, which demands the right to gaze and be gazed upon, becomes an open space of public display where Pamphilia is chained like some freakish animal, presented for others' gazing pleasure. This is because the Petrarchan lover who is also a woman is to some extent freakish within a traditionally masculinist discourse that constructs women as the site of (often competitive) male gazes. In this context, it is extremely difficult for Pamphilia to be an active gazer or gazee herself. "Noe little signe of favor can I prove/ Butt must bee way'de, and turnd to wronging love" (ll. 12-13), she says. The English Petrarchan gaze, as Wroth inherited it, is meant to be a

¹⁸ *The Whole Duty of a Woman*, 57-8.

male gaze, and women at court are closely watched for any sign of impropriety. This is not to imply that men are not under scrutiny as well - indeed, the poetry suggests that everyone is watching and being watched all the time - but that the particular violation threatened by the gazes of others in Wroth's sonnet sequence takes on gendered implications. This becomes especially significant if we remember that the public/ private distinction explored in the poetry (as will be discussed) existed sexually in the Renaissance. Women were ostensibly placed in the private realm, and even when operating in the court were expected, at least theoretically, to conform to certain behavioral constrictions. Whether private consciousness was conceived of as a private internal space or not, women's actions were theoretically confined to the domestic sphere. Thus the notion of interior spaces, created and defined by the outside world, had a concrete reality for women, as it was the physically enclosed domestic space to which they were supposed to belong. And another kind of interior space needed to be protected, since virtue was what made a woman valuable, and female virtue meant chastity. Thus the way a woman was seen to behave publicly bespoke more about her chastity than whatever she may have done in private. This obsession with being seen to behave properly saturates *The Ladies Dictionary*. It contains such subjects as "Behaviour, in Conversation," "Gate or Gesture to be Observed by Ladies," "Books. Directions to Ladies About Reading Them," "Anger in Ladies," ("it makes a beauteous face... monstrously deformed and contemptible"), and "Eye, How to Govern It." The *Dictionary* warns, "Virginity is an enclosed garden; it should not admit of any... violation, the very report may cast a blemish on it." "Discretion, silence and modesty" make up "Behaviour" in gentlewomen, and "it is that which makes them to be esteemed in the world, and fits them to go abroad in it, as they would wish to be prized and rated." All this considered, the author advises, "Let your behaviour then strongly inclined towards a reserved part..."¹⁹ So it is not surprising that Pamphilia verges on the neurotic in her desire to hide her lover's passion from the watching eyes that surround her.

There was... something always artificial about the court world... The court's own self-reflexiveness and pervasive intrigue necessitated the production of a double-edged discourse in which veiling and masking were commonly accepted.²⁰

¹⁹ *The Whole Duty of a Woman*, 56-9.

In the context of a court of intrigue and observation, Pamphilia displays a deep concern with being watched and with hiding her true feelings. Not only are the eyes of her beloved a central force in the poetry, the eyes of others have even more power over her. Her happiness is as much dependent on not being seen by them as it is on being seen by him. Pamphilia as an actively desiring subject within Petrarchanism has to hide her love as a woman in a public context. "Renaissance Women of the upper classes suffered greater restrictions [than other women in certain respects];... transgression on the part of noblewomen could jeopardize both their reputation and livelihood."²¹ This is certainly true of the world of the *Urania*, where "Pamphilia... uses the power of words to blow smokescreens in the eyes of those who would know her too closely."²² Shaver has chosen a significant metaphor when she suggests that it is eyes that are the instruments of knowledge, and thus it is eyes that must be blinded with "smokescreens" in order to protect Pamphilia from discovery.

The first sonnet marks Pamphilia's darkened self, and then accounts for the beginning of her love. The second sonnet is addressed to Amphilanthus's eyes. This suggests that the presence of eyes is integral to the cycle - the first concern after the acquisition of the lover-status is with being looked at by the beloved. Thus the desiring Petrarchan self, seeking true love and beauty and the light of goodness and self-knowledge, is directly contingent upon the beloved's eyes being bright, being the source not only of love and the potentially loving gaze, but also being a source of light to illuminate the lover. This is typically Petrarchan, as P2 is in many ways:

Deare eyes how well (indeed) you doe adorne
That blessed sphaere, which gazing soules hold deere:
The loved place of sought for triumphs neere:
The court of glory, wher Loves force was borne. (*ll.* 1-4)

Setting the pattern for Amphilanthus's oblique presence in the poetry, Pamphilia addresses not him but his eyes. This is the first suggestion that the beloved's gaze will not function typically, even as it is typically expressed. A reason why there is something different about Pamphilia's situation is suggested in the next quatrain. It is

²⁰ S.P. Cerasno and Marion Wynne-Davies, "From Myself, My Other Self I Turned" in *Gloriana's Face: Women Public and Private in the English Renaissance* ed. Cerasno and Wynne-Davies (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), 8.

²¹ *Oppositional Voices*, 121.

²² "A New Woman of Romance," 67.

not her Petrarchan gaze or his beloved's look which becomes the focus, but the opinion of others:

How might they terme you Aprills sweetest morne
When pleasing looks from those bright lights apeere:
A sun-shine day, from clouds, and mists still cleere
Kind nursing fires for wishes yett unborne! (ll. 5-8)

Amphilanthus is "terme[d]... Aprills sweetest morn" not by the poet but by "them." The public nature of the gaze is emphasised almost as quickly as the importance of the beloved's eyes. The act of gazing on him or of being gazed upon by him takes place in a relentlessly public context. "They" are aware of his gaze as much as Pamphilia is. The presence of others' gazes in the poetry is a central reason why Pamphilia cannot safely gaze upon or be gazed upon by her beloved.

Amphilanthus's being termed April's sweetest morn is contingent upon his gazes being pleasing to all of "them," not just to the poet. It is "*When* pleasing looks from those bright clouds appeere" that "they terme" his eyes. This also suggests that he looks often at these others, and looks pleasingly upon them. Indeed, Pamphilia has constantly to ask for his gaze, in sometimes abject terms, and threatens starvation from their lack throughout the sequence, because he does not often look at her without being asked.

His eyes are "A sun-shine day, from clouds, and mists still cleere." Amphilanthus is linked to the sun throughout the sequence in terms that give him enormous metaphorical power. The fact that he has such power over her is typically Petrarchan; what is strange therefore is that Pamphilia explicitly states in P2 that his eyes nurse wishes that are here "yett unborne." This is a very tentative expression of her desire, suggesting that its potential is infinite, without overtly stating the strength of her emotion. The possible extent of her wishes is implied, not spoken.

P2 ends with the awareness that his eyes can hurt, a typically Petrarchan concern. What is emphasised is their happiness and "triumph." Her Petrarchan lover's condition, of being wounded by Cupid's darts emitting from the beloved's eyes, is not expressed as a complaint, but as proof of the fact that his eyes,

Which wounding, even in hurts are deem'd delights,
Soe pleasant is ther force! Soe great theyr mights
As, happy, they can triumph in theyr harmes. (ll. 12-14)

P2 is one of the most straightforwardly Petrarchan sonnets in the sequence. The beloved's eyes are typically likened to a "sun-shine day." They are also the cause of harm to the lover. What is unusual, is that it is because they are like the sun that they can be harmful to the lover. Pamphilia can look on her beloved *too much*, and this gazing can hurt her eyes. In P5 she says: "The Sun most pleasing blinds the strongest eye/ If too much look'd on, breaking the sights string" (ll.5-6). She suggests that to look too much is cause for breaking the invisible connection that causes love, and enables looking (sight) in the first place. In other words, if she gazes too long she will go blind. This is very different to Calvin's idea that to look on the Divine Sun will enable true sight. Amphilanthus's bright power is also a destructive power. This marks him as having a capability to hurt that is more dangerous than the traditional Petrarchan beloved's ultimate power to cause good, through beauty, and thus to bring the lover to knowledge of Neoplatonic good in himself. If Pamphilia gazes too long, her sight will be broken.

In P5 it is his potential for "treason" (l.4) that causes this danger. However, implied in the rest of the sequence is the realisation that to be seen to gaze on the beloved is even more of a danger to Pamphilia. Once again, Shaver provides a metaphor that is relevant to Pamphilia's situation when she says that the opinion of others is vital - in both senses - in the voyeuristic world in which Pamphilia's sonnets are staged. "Reputation is certainly a matter of social life or death in the enclosed society of a court; it can even stand between life and starvation."²³ So the opinion of the court, if negative, can be extremely threatening. The beloved's gaze, too, is vital to the lover. Amphilanthus's gaze is often designated food to Pamphilia. In P33 she says, "Fly hence O! joy noe longer heere abide/ Too great thy pleasures ar for my dispaire/ To looke on, losses now must prove my fare/ Who nott long since, on better foode relide" (1-4). However, it is food the need for which she may not publicly acknowledge, for which she may not be seen to ask, and on which she may not be seen to feed. In P15 she says,

Deare fammish nott what you your self gave food;...
 Your sight is all the food I doe desire
 Then sacrifices mee nott in hidden fire,...
 Think butt how easy t'is a sight to give;
 Nay ev'n deserte; since by itt I doe live,

²³ "A New Woman of Romance," 65.

I butt Camaelion-like would live, and love. (ll. 1-14)

Pamphilia says not only that his gaze is her food, but that to deny her her fare would result in a *hidden* sacrifice - she would not publicly die, but he would know her internal immolation. Pamphilia's desire to "butt Camaelion-like... live, and love" emphasises her dependence on his gaze. "The chameleon was... believed to live on air because of its inanimate appearance and its ability to exist for long period without food."²⁴ So Pamphilia would live and love like a chameleon because she would be sustained only by his looks. However, the image also suggests an "inanimate appearance," which implies a stillness linked to camouflage.

Without Amphilanthus's gaze, Pamphilia is in danger of starvation. As she suggests in P33, however, she has to deal with the loss of his attention. This is related to the issue of absence in the poetry, and "Love, and absence ne're agree" (P28 l.6). In sonnet P22, Pamphilia invokes the darkness caused by Amphilanthus's absence - he brings light, like the sun, and thus has the life-giving power of a spring-time heat:

Come darkest night, beecoming sorrow best;
 Light, leave thy light; fitt for a lightsome soule;
 Darknes doth truly sute with mee oprest
 Whom absence power doth from mirthe controle...
 If trees, and leaves for absence, mourners bee
 Noe marvaile that I grieve, who like want see. (ll. 1-14)

This poem is mentioned here not only because it speaks the effects of the beloved's absence - sorrow and oppression expressed best in darkness - but because, by forging the link between summer's light and warmth and the absence of the sun in winter, and Amphilanthus's absence, it prefaces the first sonnet in the sequence where Amphilanthus is overtly constructed as the sun:

The Sunn which glads, the earth att his bright sight
 When in the morne hee showes his golden face,
 And takes the place from taedious drowsy night
 Making the world still happy in his grace;
 Shewes hapines remains nott in one place,
 Nor may the heavens alone to us give light,
 Butt hide that cheerfull face, though noe long space,
 Yett long enough for triall of theyr might;
 Butt never sunn-sett could bee soe obscure
 No desart ever had a shade soe sadd,
 Nor could black darknes ever prove soe badd

²⁴ The Poetry of Lady Mary Wroth, 94.

As paines which absence makes mee now indure;
 The missing of the sun awhile makes night
 Butt absence of my joy sees never Light. (P23)

This sonnet suggests a relationship between the sun in the sky and the poet's beloved sun. The sky's sun's "cheerfull face" can be hidden by night, and although not permanently - "though noe long space" - the disappearance of the sun has an effect on the heavens. This is expressed in terms of a testing of the heavens' power; "Yett long enough for triall of theyr might." The heavens' condition is linked to the lover's, and the lover comes off as the greater sufferer in the absence of their respective suns. "The missing of the sun awhile makes night" for the heavens, "Butt absence of my joy sees never Light" for Pamphilia. Without Amphilanthus she is always in darkness, with all the implications of personal spiritual night. This sonnet is reminiscent of Shakespeare's sonnet 33:

Full many a glorious morning have I seen
 Flatter the mountain tops with sovereign eye,
 Kissing with golden face the meadows green,
 Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy;
 Anon permit the basest clouds to ride
 With ugly rack on his celestial face,
 And from the forlorn world his visage hide,
 Stealing unseen to west with this disgrace.
 Even so my sun one early morn did shine,
 With all triumphant splendor on my brow;
 But out alack, he was but one hour mine,
 The region cloud hath masked him from me now.
 Yet him for this my love no whit disdaineth;
 Suns of the world may stain when heaven's sun staineth.²⁵

A similar metaphor is constructed, with related effect on Shakespeare's poet. The absence of the beloved's gaze is the ultimate concern of this sonnet as well, and it is also presented in terms of the effect the sun has on the earth. But far more agency is given to the sun in Shakespeare's poem - the sun "permits" the clouds that cover his face to mask his gaze from the flattered earth. In contrast, the young man is "masked" by "the region cloud," a more passive construction. But because of the initial comparison to the world's sun, the poet is suggesting that the young man allows his attention to be shifted from the poet by "the region cloud," by others. This accusation

²⁵ From *The Sonnets and Narrative Poems: The Complete Non-Dramatic Poetry* ed. W.H. Auden (New York: Penguin, 1989).

of negligence is further suggested even as it is excused in the couplet. In terms of the metaphor the poet has constructed in the first place, by comparing his young man to the sun shining on the earth, by making the beloved the poet's private sun, the poet elevates him to heavenly proportions, giving him all the power of light- and life-sustenance that heaven's sun has. Then, when the young man fails to act in a manner that is as perfect as his metaphor - when he is clouded over by the attentions of others and does not continually gaze on the poet, he is excused because he is not, after all, heaven's sun, but a sun of the world.

The obvious fundamental difference between Shakespeare's sonnet 33 and Wroth's sonnet 23, is that Pamphilia expresses no blame, and similarly does not excuse Amphilanthus's absence. Like heaven's sun, his behaviour just *is*, and is just as natural. The effect is to concentrate far more on her own internal state. Pamphilia's poem is 'about' her own darkness, whereas Shakespeare's poet demands attention from his negligent beloved. This is reflected in the couplets of both poems.

Shakespeare's poet ends with the metaphor of the two suns, thus concluding his sonnet with the disappointing behaviour of his beloved. Pamphilia ends her poem with her own sad state, with the absence of her joy and the darkness in which it leaves her. Amphilanthus is less present and less overtly accountable, and thus the compliment to his glory, light and power suggested by comparing him to the sun is less tarnished. He remains a sun in the heavens, whereas Shakespeare's poet's beloved is revealed for what he is: a fallible sun/ son of the world.

In Shakespeare's sonnet 33, the poet is obliquely asking for attention; he implies that the beloved is wrong to allow other "clouds" to obscure his face. In other words, his gaze is no longer on the poet, but on others, and the sonnet functions as a politic tactic of demand. In the long poem P42, Pamphilia makes a similar plea to be gazed upon, expressed more directly but equally as carefully. Significantly, however, the direct request is made to his eyes, and not to the beloved himself. Here, again, Amphilanthus is likened to the sun in ways that express his power. Unlike Shakespeare's poet's young man, who disappoints because he is less than heaven's sun, Amphilanthus is greater than the sun. In other words, the young man cannot sustain in his actions the metaphorical perfection his poet gives him, whereas Amphilanthus's status transcends that of the heaven's sun:

You happy blessed eyes,

Which in that ruling place
 Have force both to delight, and to disgrace,
 Whose light allures...
 O! looke on mee, who doe att mercy stande: (ll. 1-6)

The poem begins with the staple Petrarchan compliment. The beloved's eyes sit in the "ruling place" of love, his face, and have the power to give both joy and pain. The eyes' light is, typically, alluring, and the poet is at their "mercy." However, in this song the harmful power the eyes have is specifically designated as the "force... to disgrace." Thus the sense of Pamphilia's particular context is immediately invoked, and she "stande[s]" "att mercy" not only of rejection but of public humiliation. She is totally, abjectly, dependent on her beloved's gaze:

T'is you that rule my lyfe
 T'is you my comforts give;
 Then lett nott scorne to mee my ending drive,
 Nor lett the frownes of stryfe
 Have might to hurt those lights
 Which while they shine are true loves delights. (ll. 7-12)

Once again, responsibility for "hurt" is deferred; it is not the perfect eyes, "Which while they shine are true loves delights" that are the source of pain. It is "stryfe" who has the power, the "might to hurt those lights," his eyes, that Pamphilia asks to be protected against. This can only function as strongly as it does here, to refrain from tainting the perfection of the beloved's gaze, because Strife and Scorn are metaphysical characters throughout the sequence. The split between the beatific power of the eyes and the harmful power of the other, negative companions in the cycle can thus alleviate responsibility for her pain from Amphilanthus's eyes. Amphilanthus is never held directly accountable for not looking on his poet-lover. This is further suggested in the clause "while they shine." While the eyes are open, while they are looking, they are "true loves delights." However, they have the power to close. This is a careful and tentative plea for attention, very different to Shakespeare's poet's.

Pamphilia continues the analogy of night's relationship to the sun in the natural world to make a point about darkness and light. Light facilitates the gazing sight of all:

See butt, when Night appears,
 And Sunn hath lost his force

How his loss doth all joye from us divorce;
 And when hee shines, and cleares
 The heav'ns from cloudes of night
 How happy then is made our gazing sight. (*ll.* 13-18)

Thus once again Pamphilia is not alone in possessing a "gazing sight." Others are also affected by the sun's absence, as Pamphilia talks of the effect of the sun's loss on "us." Also, the sun of heaven is regularly overpowered by night. The "Sunn" in the sky periodically loses his force which is why Amphilanthus's gaze is:

Butt more then Sunns faire light
 Your beames doe seeme to mee,
 Whose sweetest lookes doe tye and yett make free (*ll.* 19-22)

Unlike Shakespeare's poet's beloveds, who are like or nothing like the sun, Amphilanthus is consistently more than the sun.

Then shall the Sun give place
 As to your greater might,
 Yeelding that you doe show more perfect light,
 O, then, butt grant this grace
 Unto your love-tied slave
 To shine on mee, who to you all fayth gave; (*ll.* 31-36)

His is the "greater might" because he can shine whenever he chooses, including at night. He also becomes the "more perfect light" that reveals the Sun's light as inadequate, just as Calvin's Sun of Divine Knowledge reveals ordinary sight as inadequate to perceive true Wisdom. This praise is also a plea "To shine on mee." Pamphilia's reminder that she is the one "who to you all fayth gave" is expressed significantly as part of the request for attention within a poem that designates Amphilanthus the greatest source of light of all, because it ironically emphasises her predicament. Paulissen suggests different interpretations for the names of the title characters than the ones given by Roberts (the latter's have been referred to throughout this thesis so far). Paulissen's translation of "Amphilanthus" relates directly to the notion of light. Amphilanthus is "one who scatters light all around": "amphi" being the Latin for "all around" and "lanthus" meaning a light or lantern.²⁶ Amphilanthus is the untrue beloved because he scatters his sun-light, he spreads it amongst many. Pamphilia's plea "To shine on mee," therefore, is always in vain. By

²⁶ The Love Sonnets of Lady Mary Wroth, 91.

his nature, once again, Amphilanthus can never be a constant source of uninterrupted light. Whether he is a “lover of two” as Roberts suggests, or “One who scatters light all around,” he will never return Pamphilia’s undivided attentions.

So Pamphilia is the Petrarchan “love-tied slave,” and throws herself completely at his mercy, in order to ask for this individual attention, which heaven’s sun cannot give since it shines indiscriminately (“*our* gazing sight” is after all directed at the sun in the sky). However, if Amphilanthus is “one who scatters light all around” he also facilitates the gazes of others. So her plea is in vain, her attempts to construct him metaphorically as greater than the sun in order to privilege herself are doomed to failure. The awareness of the gaze of others, which she cannot control either, comes into the last stanza of this song. Pamphilia refers to the others, to “them,” and their lies, and ends the song with a plea for “true desire,” as opposed to the “fayned fire” of, presumably, the kind of lust used in the world to masquerade as love:

And when you please to frowne
 Use your most killing eyes
 On them, who in untruth and faulcehood lyes;
 Butt (deare) on mee cast downe
 Sweet lookes for true desire
 That bannish doe all thought of fayned fire. (II.37-42)

By asking his eyes to “cast downe” their “sweet lookes” on her, Pamphilia is physically elevating them above her, in the heavens of his perfection, like the sun in the sky is above the earth. However, like every Petrarchan beloved’s, these eyes have the potential to be “killing” in their frowns. Taking this knowledge to its logical extreme, Pamphilia often portrays an awareness that the sun can be dangerous, and these better-than-the-sun eyes are no exception. In P23 there is the image of the desert, a terrain scorched barren by the sun. Love’s “sunn” also pains her in P53 (I.4). And the sun, if too much looked on, can break the sight’s string in P5. Here, in P42, the beloved’s eyes can be “most killing” when he chooses, as devastating as a burning desert sun. Pamphilia is thus in an unsafe position when she addresses a plea to one who has the power to kill, and who by his nature casts his light all around. What she needs as a Petrarchan lover is for her beloved’s eyes to focus on her, but that is precisely the one assurance on which she can never rely.

Nevertheless, Pamphilia needs the light of his gaze more than she needs the life-giving rays of the real sun. In P91, his sight is “More cleere, more bright then

morning sunn" (l.2), where there is a Shakespearean pun on morning/ mourning. The sun is not only the light seen in the morning, but is also an entity that is in mourning because Amphilanthus is greater, and the sun may know it. Pamphilia's dependency being thus stated, she once again asks, "Deerest then this kindnes give,/ And grant mee lyfe which is your sight/ Wherin I more blessed live/ Then graced with the sunns faire light" (ll.21-24). In P50, Amphilanthus causes the sun's envy by being the greater of the two. His eyes, imbued as they are with the power of love, are blind Cupid's joy. Again in this sonnet, there is a link between the lack of his sight and darkness. And there is the sense that Pamphilia's state of darkened misery is caused by "those" who wish her ill:

O dearest eyes the lights, and guids of love,
 The joyes of Cupid who himself borne blind
 To your bright shining doth his triumphs bind
 For in your seeing doth his glory move;
 How happy are those places wher you prove
 Your heavenly beames which make the sunn to find
 Envy, and grudging hee soe long hath shind
 For your cleer lights, to match his beames above.
 But now, Alas, your sight is heere forbid
 And darknes must thes poore lost roomes possess
 Soe bee all blessed lights from henceforth hid
 That this black deed of darknes have excess,
 For why shold heaven afford least light to those
 Who for my misery such darcknes chose.

Pamphilia asks for darkness everywhere, so that "those" who "forbid" Amphilanthus's sight to her, those who caused her misery-in-darkness, should themselves be denied the light of the sun. Once again Amphilanthus is not accountable for not turning his gaze on Pamphilia, but is prevented from doing so by their mutual circumstances. Pamphilia often conceives of her darkened inner spaces as "thes poore lost roomes," possessed by darkness and absence. This emphasises Pamphilia's constant return to the absence, the void, inside herself, which has sexual as well as psychological implications. The beloved's beatific light does not illuminate these darkened inner spaces, and thus cannot lead this Petrarchan lover to the light of ideal Truth and Goodness.

In P62, the unreliable nature of the beloved's eyes is more overtly explicated. Can you be good and evil at the same time? she asks them. Significantly, their power

to disappoint is expressed in terms that relate them to the context of the treasonous and spiteful world:

Fairest, and still truest eyes
Can you the lights bee, and the spies
Of my desires?
Can you shine cleere for loves delight,
And yett the breeders bee of spite,
And jealous fires? (*ll.* 1-6)

The beloved's eyes breed jealousy, which must imply the presence of others, or at least an other, in this interaction between poet and eyes. That this jealousy is linked to "spite" would suggest that Pamphilia is talking once again of the watching eyes of the spiteful world that surrounds her. It is with an awareness of their world's potential to spy, to be jealous, that she warns him to be aware of being gazed upon in turn.

Mark what lookes doe you beehold,
Such as by jealousie are told
They want your love:
See how they sparcle in distrust
Which by a heat of thoughts unjust
In them doe move; (*ll.* 7-12)

"They" both lack and desire the light in Amphilanthus's eyes - "They want your love." These watching eyes contain a heat and light of their own, but they bespeak very different qualities to the usual Petrarchan ones - their light "sparcle[s] in distrust" and their heat is caused by "thoughts unjust." Consequently, Pamphilia warns

Amphilanthus's eyes to behave in the same way she does:

Learne to guide your course by art
Chang your eyes into your hart,
And patient bee
Till fruitles jealousie gives leave
By safest absence to receave
What you would see; (*ll.* 13-18)

Here Pamphilia requests her beloved's eyes to move internally, like she herself does in the sequence as a whole. This is the only time in the poetry that such a course of action is suggested for the beloved. It is also the only time that absence becomes safe. Absence becomes a site that can be filled, the only place where "What you would see" can be "receave[d]." It is when his eyes have the choice, when they can decide to look inwards after having rejected the spiteful and jealous outside world, that absence is imbued with positive qualities. And it is significant that Pamphilia is suggesting such a

move, when she herself has no choice but to be thrown back on her own absence time and again. It is almost as though Pamphilia is explaining her strategies of self-protection in a way that will make them seem more of an active choice than they are. The most important question is, do Amphilanthus's eyes need this advice? There is no evidence in the poetry to suggest that the beloved himself is unhappy with the status quo. Rather, in this song Pamphilia wishes for him what she wishes for herself - to be safely internally insulated, in a space about to be filled with the light of love that enables sight. This ideal situation never actually exists in the sonnet cycle. When Pamphilia says her beloved does look on her with love, it is ambiguously expressed. In P47: "His sight gives lyfe unto my love-rulde eyes/ My love content beecause in his, love lies" (*ll.* 13-14). There is the obvious pun on his love existing in his eyes, and his eyes not telling the truth as they pretend to express love to her "love-rulde eyes" which might see love where it does not really exist.

Pamphilia's "love-rulde eyes" are as much characters in the poetry as Amphilanthus's lying eyes are. In sonnet P29, Pamphilia addresses her own eyes.

Poore eyes bee blind, the light behold noe more
 Since that is gon which is your deere delight
 Ravish'd from you by greater powre, and might
 Making your loss a gaine to others store (*ll.* 1-4)

From the opening quatrain of this sonnet, "others" are implicated in the absence of "that... which is your deere delight," the presence (and therefore gaze) of the beloved. The most desired alternative to the sight of him is self-enforced blindness. This self-mutilation follows a sense of being "Ravish'd," forced by "a greater powre." There is a sense of some kind of struggle, during which Pamphilia's eyes are overpowered, and that which is most important and valuable to them taken against their will. This is a clear example of the gaze of others functioning as a kind of a rape. And the ravishers, who have more power than Pamphilia's "poore eyes," gain from what she has lost. This is an extreme expression of the fact that Amphilanthus's attention has been diverted away from the poet, and emphasises not only how desperately she needs his gaze, but how dangerous and invasive are the gazes of those around her. She continues, telling her eyes to

Oreflowe, and drowne, till sight to you restore
 That blessed star, and as in hatefull spite
 Send forth your teares in flouds, to kill all sight,

And lookes, that lost, wherein you joy'd before...
 Till that bright starr doe once againe apeere
 Brighter then Mars when he doth shine most cleere
 See nott: then by his might bee you redeem'd. (*ll.* 5-14)

Pamphilia's eyes are dependent on Amphilanthus's gaze - "that bright starr" - returning to them in order to return them to sight, to restore her sight to life. This is a tenuous life-saver indeed. In opposition to Amphilanthus's life-restoring gaze, the independent power that her eyes have is the power of death, the ability to "floud... to kill all sight." Thus it is implied that it is not only her power to see that her eyes can kill, but Amphilanthus's power to be seen. This threat of death is matched by his eyes, however. Amphilanthus's eyes are likened to Mars, with the God of War's aggressive, martial implications, and indeed it is upon his "might" that she is dependent for redemption. Roberts, in her gloss of this poem, says that "It is appropriate that the sonneteer compares her 'star' with the masculine Mars, rather than the traditional feminine planet, Venus."²⁷ But Mars has very different qualities to Venus, with the power not to kill gently with love, but violently with arms. (The ambivalent and sometimes viciously gendered qualities assigned to Venus in other poems are not invoked here, probably because Venus is not specifically mentioned). And Amphilanthus's gaze is brighter than Mars, as it is brighter and greater than the sun. The implications are not reassuring, since they assume the violence of war is the same energy that can restore Pamphilia's eyes to safety.

In P54 Pamphilia plans a murder with her eyes. But it is a self-murder (as the advice in P29 was for self-blinding), as Pamphilia advises her eyes to keep their tears inside themselves, in her internal "roome," until they have amassed enough to drown her:

O stay mine eyes, shed nott thes fruitles teares
 Since hope is past to winn you back againe
 That treasure which beeing lost breeds all your paine
 Cease from this poore betraying of your feares,
 Think this too childish is, for wher grieve reares
 Soe high a powre, for such a wreched gaine;
 Sighs, nor laments should thus bee spent in vaine:
 True sorrow, never outward wayling beares;
 Bee rul'd by mee, keepe all the rest in store,
 Till noe roome is that may containe one more,

²⁷ The Poetry of Lady Mary Wroth, 101.

Then in that sea of teares, drowne hapless mee,
 And I'le provide such store of sighs as part
 Shalbe enough to break the strongest hart,
 This dunn, wee shall from torments freed be.

Working together, her eyes will provide the tears and she will provide enough sighs "to break the strongest heart." This strongest heart could be Amphilanthus's, with the implication that Pamphilia's suffering is enough to garner pity from even this unconstant beloved. However, the strongest heart in the sequence is undoubtedly Pamphilia's, the heart that has endured so much burning and piercing torture. Thus her own heart will break as a result of her pain. This is the only way to be free from torments. There is no mention in this sonnet of Mars's (or anyone else's) potential intervention. Because her eyes are directed inwards, to her inner rooms, they cannot but drown her in their own tears. The poem offers an economy of sorrow - do not waste your tears on futile crying, Pamphilia tells her eyes. Rather store them up until there are enough in which to drown. This is the opposite to the usual Petrarchan outward and upward gazing lover, who finds true knowledge through his eyes. Pamphilia finds only despair and annihilation, since she cannot reflexively reflect on her beloved's light and beauty, she cannot be fed on his gaze. The grief that results is enough to make suicide the only option.

The reason Pamphilia's eyes have such a difficult time finding redemption is not only because of the nature of her beloved. She does not warn them that he is unreliable, but she constantly warns them that they are being watched:

Take heed mine eyes, how you your lookes doe cast
 Least they betray my harts most secret thought;
 Bee true unto your selves for nothings bought
 More deere then doubt which brings a lovers fast.
 Catch you all watching eyes, ere they bee past,
 Or take yours fixt wher your best love hath sought
 The pride of your desires; lett them bee taught
 Theyr faults for shame, they could noe truer last;
 Then looke, and looke with joye for conquest wunn
 Of those that search'd your hurt in double kind;
 Soe you kept safe, lett them themselves looke blinde
 Watch, gaze, and marke till they to madnes runn,
 While you, mine eyes injoye full sight of love
 Contented that such hapinesses move. (P39)

To be seen to gaze, to be caught casting your looks, is to "betray my heart's most secret thought." The angling metaphor suggested in the fact that Pamphilia's eyes must "cast" her looks carefully and "catch" all watching eyes suggests that this is a world where bait is laid in order to create situations of betrayal. Petrarchan love, which was designed to be sung to the skies, is here the lover's "most secret thought." Pamphilia's eyes would do better to "catch... all watching eyes" than to make her own feelings known. The other alternative is to remain fixed on her beloved, which would serve as a lesson in constancy to the prying eyes which are also fickle - "they could not truer last." It is only once they have been shamed by the realisation of their own inconstancy, it is only "Then" that Pamphilia's eyes can "looke." This is an important qualification, especially since it seems highly improbable that such a situation will ever result in this shamelessly voyeuristic world. And when she is able to look, it will be to "looke... for conquest wunn/ Of those that search'd your hurt." So she will be seeking to find conquest - since she will have to look for it, it is not assured. Also, before she can look at her beloved, she has to conquer the other watching eyes. There is still no sense of direct access to the beloved's gaze. In other words, Pamphilia gives her eyes permission to gaze, but not only upon her beloved, and not before they have gazed elsewhere first. Pamphilia's "eyes enjoye full sight of love," but only once they have caught the other watching eyes. Thus the right to gaze on the beloved is deferred until after Pamphilia's victory over the other eyes in the poem. The enjoyment of the full sight of love is thus not experienced in the poem, but only anticipated. Pamphilia's eyes' main relationship is not with her beloved here. This sonnet utilises the traditional Petrarchan idea of a conquest but here the war is not with the beloved or with Love, but with the other watching eyes.

These eyes "search'd your hurt in double kind." The "double kind" here extends to the two possible meanings of "hurt": wound and heart. Pamphilia's Petrarchan heart is always also a wound - in P1 it is impaled on Cupid's flaming arrow, and as a Petrarchan lover her heart experiences the pain of unrequited love. There is a sense in this poem of the searing gazes of others opening her hurt heart, looking into her wound. Like the image of being ravished by others' gazes in P29, there is the sexual connotation of another kind of privacy having been violated by these watching eyes. They have looked into the open lips of a hidden wound. Thus to be seen to be gazing is expressed in terms that link the shame of being an active gazer

to the shame of being sexually revealed - an implication that only works for, and is only relevant to, a female lover in a specific personal-political context. It is only when a woman breaks taboo in ways that impact on her gender role that she can suggest that to be seen to gaze is to spread her legs for all to inspect. It is thus not surprising that Pamphilia emphasises to her eyes that in order for them to be safe, they need to watch and not to be watched; they must give these others nothing to see: "Soe you kept safe, lett them themselves looke blinde/ Watch, gaze, and marke till they to madnes runn." In a frenzy of frustration, jealousy and curiosity, these invading ravishers will "runn to madnes" when Pamphilia's self-protection works to hide her eyes.

This need to remain unseen is expressed in P39 as leading to a moment of quiet happiness. In contrast to the madness of the others, "... you, mine eyes injoye full sight of love/Contented that such hapinesses move." It is only when the watching eyes are diverted with their own frenzy, deprived of reason and thus of the ability to watch carefully, that Pamphilia's eyes can gaze contentedly on her beloved. However, even here, the suggestion is not that she will have gone through all this torment with the outside world in order to create a safe space in which to receive the gaze of the beloved. Rather, she will be contented that he exists - she can look on him in peace, but he is still not looking back at her. She can gaze, "Contented" in the "happinesses" she sees. The plural could be referring to Amphilanthus's eyes, as this is a sonnet about eyes after all. The fact that there is more than one happiness that moves in "full sight of love," however, could also suggest that Pamphilia is observing other lovers who have managed to evade the "watching eyes." Either way, Pamphilia is doing the looking, and is not being looked upon in love by Amphilanthus, or anyone else.

It is not always easy for Pamphilia to accept that she must keep her loving gaze to herself. In P41, her heart is tortured on a rack precisely because she cannot publicly display her love: "Yett is itt sayd that sure love can nott bee/ Wher soe small showe of passion is descrid,/ When thy chiefe paine is that I must itt hide/ From all save only one who showld itt see" (ll.9-12).

So the eyes of others play at least as much of a role in Wroth's sonnet sequence as the eyes of her beloved, and in an untypically Petrarchan way. Although other presences in Petrarchan poetry are usually present primarily as poetic competition or disapproving friends, there are also spies in other Petrarchan

sequences. Shakespeare's poet has to contend with the demonic "affable familiar ghost/ Which nightly gulls [his rival poet] with intelligence" (s. 86), and Astrophil has to run away from the patrolling "lowts" of Sidney's Eleventh Song. Nevertheless, the other people implied in a Petrarchan sequence generally are not as embodied in the visibility motif as is the beloved. In Pamphilia to Amphilanthus, however, the power to gaze extends its significance beyond the poet-beloved relationship. It is not only the poet who has the primary ability to gaze, and it is not primarily her beloved that she gazes upon. Similarly, it is not the beloved's reciprocal gaze that Pamphilia is most aware of, but the gazes of the other eyes in her poetry. In other words, Pamphilia's joy does not derive only from the light of her beloved's eyes (and even when she does feel pleasure from being looked upon by him, it is a tenuous and untrustworthy joy, since his gaze can never be depended upon to be constant). She also derives joy from being able not to be seen. In P26 she says, "The joy which I take, is that free from eyes/ I sitt" (ll. 5-6). One of her most important activities, and her most "pleasing pastime" in this poem, is to hide herself from others' eyes.

It becomes part of the proof of true love that it should be hidden. Any love expressed publicly in this treacherous context is suspect. In P46 Pamphilia says: "Itt is nott love which you poore fooles do deeme/ That doth apeare by fond, and outward showes/.../ 'Tis nott a showe of sighes, or teares can prove/ Who loves indeed" (ll. 1-9). This is an aspect of Petrarchan discourse - that elaborate "showes" of love are "nott love" - in other words, that the writing Petrarchan poet is making a claim for sincerity in the expression of his/her love, by disclaiming that the Petrarchan sonnets s/he has written are like other Petrarchan sonnets, which are *merely* praise and not *true* praise, that elusive and contradictory Petrarchan ideal. However, Pamphilia's writing has a more complicated relationship with the notion of Petrarchan praise than is usual. Concerned not with how to praise and sound like you really mean it in a discourse that praises as a matter of course, she is convinced rather that her Petrarchan love must always remain hidden. There is no preoccupation with sounding as if you sound sincere, since Pamphilia is not interested in sounding at all, but in remaining quiet: "Butt in the soule true love in safety lies/ Guarded by faith" (ll. 12-13). This is Pamphilia's particular Petrarchan paradox, and it is linked to her issues as a female Petrarchan poet. Because she has less access to both the public fulfillment of Petrarchanism and its language of public display, because as a woman she is not

allowed to offer her words as proof of her love and skill in a Renaissance context that is deeply suspicious of a woman who wishes to present herself publicly, she has to speak the desire to hide her Petrarchan love, and to silence the public speaking such love entails.

Darkness takes on another character in this context, as can be seen in P65. Despite the fact that darkness was used as a trope for illicit liaisons throughout the poetry of the time, and thus “to love in darkness is precisely to invite spite,”²⁸ darkness enables a safe space for lovers in the context of Pamphilia’s world. Considering Pamphilia’s need to hide, the lack of light is not caused by Amphilanthus’s absence, but is a “most blessed” situation that facilitates love by providing cover for Lovers, where they cannot be seen, and can thus love “free from spite”:

Most blessed Night, the happy time for love,
The shade for Lovers, and theyr loves delight,
The Raigne of Love for servants, free from spite...
Now hast thou made thy glory higher prove
Then did the God, whose pleasant reede did smite
All Argus eyes into a deathlike night
Till they were safe, that non could love reprove
Now thou hast clos’d those eyes from priing sight
That nourish jealousie more than joyes right
While vaine suspition fosters theyr mistrust,
Making sweet sleepe to master all suspect
Which els theyr privatt feares would nott neglect
But would imbrace both blinded, and unjust.

There is a narrative of violence underlying this “blessed... happy time.” Argus of the hundred eyes was lulled to sleep by Mercury, so that he could be murdered. Mercury was engaged on this bloody mission at the behest of Jove, on order to free his mortal lover Io who had been captured by the jealous Juno. Thus there is sadistic intent behind Pamphilia’s reference to Night’s being proven ever higher in glory than “the God, whose pleasant reede did smite/ All Argus eyes into a deathlike night/ Till they were safe, that non could love reprove.”²⁹ There is an underlying discourse of jealousy and betrayal in the presentation of Night as a safe space for lovers to conduct their hidden assignations. Even here, then, darkness is connected with death. The sleeping

²⁸ I am indebted to David Schalkwyk for this idea.

²⁹ Bensimon explicates the connection between the visual representation of Argus in Renaissance art, and sadism, “The significance of eye imagery in the Renaissance,” 275.

world, a world that when awake and aware is full of “jealousie” “vaine suspition” and “mistrust” is vulnerable to Pamphilia’s revenge. Sleep becomes a kind of death by analogy with the story of Argus. But this darkness full of violence is all the refuge that lovers have. In daylight, the hundred vigilant Argus eyes of the waking world “theyr privatt feares would nott neglect/ But would imbrace both blinded, and unjust.” Even open, the eyes of the watching others are “blinded” with their jealousy, suspicion, and “privatt feares.” So the notion of a beatific Light that reveals Truth and Goodness is absent from this vile world, and it is only in this context that Night becomes a preferable alternative to daylight.

Gazing is clearly a problematic activity for Pamphilia in this world. She needs Amphilanthus’s gaze but she needs as much to hide from the gazes of others, which are full of jealousy and spite. This need to remain hidden is very unusual to the dominant Petrarchan discourse, and is one of the primary factors in Wroth’s counterdiscursive Petrarchanism. The desire not to speak pain and to hide love stands in opposition to the fact that Petrarchan poetry is a public statement of desire, almost a celebration of the lover’s state. Pamphilia does not revel in the light of her beloved’s sun-like eyes, but seeks to hide her gaze and her love in her darkened inner self.

In P100 she banishes day from her internal rooms forever, locating true love in thought alone.

O! That noe day would ever more appeere,
 Butt cloudy night to governe this sad place,
 Nor light from heav’n thes haples rooms to grace
 Since that light’s shadow’d which my love holds deere;
 Lett thickest mists in envy master heere,
 And sunn-borne day for malice showe noe face,
 Disdaining light wher Cupid, and the race
 Of Lovers are dispisde, and shame shines cleere.
 Let mee bee darke, since bard of my chiefe light;
 And wounding jealousie commands by might; (ll. 1-10)

In this world, which is clouded with the mists of envy and ruled by the tyrant Jealousy, “shame shines cleere.” Shame becomes the new source of brightness and presumably tinges all it illuminates with its own specific colour. The Light of love that emanates from the beloved has no place in such a world. The hidden pleasures of the Night-time lovers are here reduced to the constructed antics of “disguised pleasures” that function like the intrigues in a stage play, and the stars (who traditionally also shine

from the beloved's eyes, as lights of beauty) become various stock literary characters, to be taken on as convenient identities and changed at will:

Butt stage play like disguised pleasures give;
 To mee itt seems as ancient fictions make
 The starrs all fashions, and all shapes partake
 While in my thoughts true forme of love shall live. (*ll.* 11-14)

The Ideal love can be achieved not by entering into the deceptions and masquerades of this world of artifice and fashion, but by returning to the lover's inner thoughts. There is no beatific light from the beloved, so Pamphilia's inner spaces are governed by "cloudy night." There is also no light of goodness in the world, a place where "sunn-borne day for malice showe noe face,/ Disdaining light wher Cupid, and the race/ Of Lovers are dispisde." The complex syntax of this poem suggests that Pamphilia can choose either to "partake" of "all shapes" while hiding her true love in her thoughts, or to reject the "stage play like" nature of "disguised pleasures." Whichever way the poem is read, Pamphilia is forced to confront the deceptive practices of her world. Whether she is seen to use these deceptive practices or to reject them, she still has to hide her true love "in my thoughts." Ultimately, Pamphilia's Petrarchan love seeks to be secretive. To publicly acknowledge hidden love is to make it part of the "stage play like" love of this world.

It thus can be seen that in Pamphilia to Amphilanthus, eyes are an ever-present symbol. This symbol functions in ways that are typically Petrarchan, but also illustrate the complications for an actively gazing female lover in a world relentlessly public and always vigilantly watching. Both Amphilanthus's eyes and Pamphilia's are addressed as characters in the sequence. But the eyes of others have an equally important role. All other eyes are turned on Pamphilia, while her eyes are turned on Amphilanthus when they can be, and when he is absent, which is most of the time, they are turned inward, on herself, on her own dark internal rooms. So visibility functions in a different way in this cycle, to reinscribe the circular, inward-moving circle prevalent in the poetry as a whole. The beloved's gaze does not function as a source of beatific light, but rather emphasises the darkness that results whenever Pamphilia attempts to rely on the light of his eyes to function in a typical Petrarchan manner. Amphilanthus's gaze cannot bring her knowledge of herself, because such self-knowledge is, traditionally, intrinsically the knowledge of the masculine poetic subject.

Chapter 6: “The most excellent natural cure”: Negotiations with the God Love

“Anger is unseemly and discommendable in all, but more especially in young ladies, who like doves, should be without the gall that ferments and stirs up these kind[s] of passions to disturb and hurt the mind, and spot the names of those that indulge them with the epithets of rash, peevish, revengeful and inconsiderate anger... For the most part proceeding from pusillanimity or softness of spirit, which makes the fair sex frequently more subject to anger than the other, by reason the passions of their minds are sooner moved and agitated... Be diligent then, ladies, to observe that it gain not too great a power over you... observe what we now lay down as rules to be regarded in avoiding or remedying this dangerous evil: 1) Anger arising in your breasts, instantly seal up your lips, and let it not go forth... 2) Observe that humility is the most excellent natural cure for anger”

-*The Ladies Dictionary*¹

“If thou go about to master a woman, hoping to bring her to humility, there is no way to make her good with stripes, except thou beat her to death”

- Joseph Swetnam *The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward, and Unconstant Women; or the Vanity of Them, Choose You Whether. With a Commendation of Wise, Virtuous, and Honest Women* (1615)²

One of the major concerns of Pamphilia to Amphilanthus is an exploration of the nature of Love, and how Love in its various incarnations affects the lover. There are certain implications for Pamphilia as a female Petrarchan lover in her relationship with the god Love, which the sequence explores through personifying Love in various ways. Love takes on three major, distinct natures in the sonnets. I will look at Love in its incarnation as a warrior-king, and then in the way Love is depicted as Cupid. I will try to show that Pamphilia is aware of Love as dangerous, regardless of whether it is as a conquering general or a little boy. She is always aware of the great power Love has as a god who must be respected. Lastly, I will discuss the ideal court of Love Pamphilia tries to create in the “crowne of Sonetts” within the sequence, in order to show how she attempts to write her way out of her unhappy situation as an unrequited lover in a cruel and watching world. This attempt fails, however, and the result is to reaffirm that Pamphilia is trapped within the labyrinth of her lover’s situation, and always at the mercy of a dangerous Love.

¹ Qtd. The Whole Duty of a Woman, 58-9.

² Qtd. The Whole Duty of a Woman, 70.

Pamphilia says in the first sonnet that she was made a lover against her will. Love, then, becomes a force with which she must constantly engage. In many ways, this relationship with Love is concerned with exploring how a female Petrarchan lover can express her difficulties, and how she can create a way out of the hardship of being a woman lover-poet within a masculinist tradition and an oppressive culture.

Wroth explores the notion of Love for a female poetic subject via Pamphilia's relationship with Love as an externalised entity. The sentiments about Love are ultimately 'about' either the lover (since it is her own emotion she is describing), or the beloved (since he is engendering the emotion in the first place). However, the fact that Love is such a powerful presence in the poetry, as a character (or as various characters), means that Pamphilia's relationship with Love takes on a life of its own. The love that she feels becomes a personified being, against which she can rail, and with whom she can negotiate. In other words, Pamphilia's relationship with Love as an external, independent entity, may be on one level a metaphor for her relationship with her own emotion, and by extension with her beloved, but it is also a real relationship with Love as a personified character, beyond the relationship with the beloved. In this way the poems that deal with the nature of Love become a debate about the emotion itself, and its relation to the lover. The boundaries between Pamphilia's internal lover's state and a Love constituted and imposed externally are constantly in flux in Wroth's poetry. By virtue of the personification of Love as a separate entity to Pamphilia, the lover is split off from Love in certain ways that emphasise this internal/ external exploration. Love is not only an internal emotion experienced by the lover within herself. By constituting Love as an external 'character,' separate from the lover, Wroth is indicating that Love may be an emotion belonging as much to the world outside the lover's emotional state as it does to her inner feelings. Any notion of the private inner self is influenced by that self's external context. In the same way, the lover is as caught up in a particular social and political world as she is in her own internal pain. There are thus external constraints on the way the lover can love, as well as on the way she can express her love, especially if she is Petrarchan, and is writing within a 300-year-old tradition. Furthermore, if the lover is a woman, there are other externally imposed definitional and self-definitional categories to which she is subject.

Wroth's poetry has often been read as a poetry of interiority, both in this thesis and in the critical literature. However, in its exploration of the nature of Love as an external character, Wroth's poetry can be seen to complicate the idea of interiority as the only option available to a female Renaissance poet. The absolute distinction between public and private, applied to notions of 'appropriate' female behaviour at the time, and which the poetry itself often so neatly seems to be invoking, is revealed as a false distinction. Interiority is conditioned by exteriority, and any female self being spoken by the first Englishwoman to enter the realm of public Petrarchan poetry cannot escape the external constitutive pressures of her world. In other words, men in the Renaissance, socially and poetically, were already public beings. They did not have to negotiate private, interior spaces in which and from which to speak, or to speak themselves, as Pamphilia so often does in her Petrarchan poetry. But understanding public, exterior space as male can easily lead to the opposition of internal spaces as being completely separate from the public realm. Because women were denied access to public arenas, these internal spaces can easily be designated 'female' spaces, that is, the only option available to female subjects. Wroth's designation and exploration of Love as an external force, often characterised politically (as will be seen) breaks down this absolute public/male - private/female distinction. The poetry explores the ways in which interiority is determined by external forces. It does this by removing Love from the lover's heart, changing the emotion from an internally burning pain to the externalisation of the emotion in Love's personification as various characters. Then, by responding to and engaging with these various characters in ways that examine the lover's relationship with Love's different incarnations, the poetry illustrates how the internal - the lover's emotion - is constituted by the external - since Love comes to represent a force outside of the lover's self even as it describes and affects the lover's self.

One of the most important ways in which Wroth illustrates the effects of external influences on internal selfhood, is through what she leaves out of her exploration of the nature of the Love with which Pamphilia must engage. Venus is almost totally excluded from the poetry's debates about and with Love. Venus briefly appears in the sonnets as a female lover with whom Pamphilia can identify, but she is also the Queen of Lust. Venus always appears in the sonnets in relation to her son Cupid, and it is he who is the primary God of Love in the sequence. Thus, despite the

fact that Venus begins the sequence in P1 - literally, by selecting Pamphilia's heart and commanding that her son shoot it with Love's arrow - and despite the fact that Cupid is at her feet in this sonnet, illustrating that she is the dominant power in the poem, she does not play a large part in the poetry's exploration of Love. The exclusion of Venus, her silencing, speaks some of the ways that the external world affects the internal spaces of the female lover. To invoke Venus is to invoke female sexuality, and this is precisely what cannot be spoken by Pamphilia, due to the cultural rules of her time. Therefore, to separate Venus from the prolonged debate about Love's nature in the poetry is to split sexuality off from the Love Pamphilia says she feels, and proceeds to explore. Lust cannot be a spoken part of Pamphilia's love, despite the fact that the Petrarchan nature of her love traditionally allows for the expression of various kinds of desires. By virtue of the fact that she is a woman, however, Pamphilia is barred from the same kind of access to these desires as her male counterparts. Lust cannot be a factor in Pamphilia's discussion of her Love, since for a woman to discuss her lust is to be wanton, uncontrollable, 'unfeminine' and ultimately unlovable.

Therefore, an implication for the exclusion of Venus in the discussion of Love's nature is the acknowledgment that the interior spaces created and described by the poetry are affected by the external world's rules for female propriety. As a Renaissance woman Pamphilia cannot celebrate Venus, since to do so would be to celebrate female sexuality, an act forbidden by her world's notions of appropriate female behaviour. To celebrate Venus would also be to celebrate her own sexuality, to speak aspects of her own sexual desires and powers, which would have been taboo in a Renaissance context. Thus the silencing of Venus is in some ways a self-silencing. The Love Pamphilia addresses is largely purged of her own sexuality. However, Wroth's apparent decision to exclude Venus either fails or is craftily undermined in the crowne of Sonetts, where Venus suddenly explodes into Love's ideal, platonic court half-way through the *corona*, shattering the controlled and harmonious tone Pamphilia had worked so hard to create. Ultimately, Venus cannot be silenced or excluded from a discussion about Love's relationship with the lover, although the fact that Pamphilia appears to attempt to do so reflects on the ways in which her understanding of herself as a lover is affected by her world's understanding of her position as a woman.

Pamphilia's relationship with Love as a character in the sonnets is a far more discursive one than her relationship with her beloved. The poetry displaces many of the issues that Pamphilia has with Amphilanthus onto her interaction with Love. Because the relationship with Love is discursive, because Pamphilia engages in discussions with, wheedlings and petitions to Love, this relationship marks many attempts by Pamphilia to resist her condition as an unrequited and unwilling lover. The sequence as a whole has often been read, following Roberts,³ as being far more concerned with the poet's exploration of herself as a lover, of the lover's state, than with a love-relationship with the beloved. The beloved's absence in the text as a constructed character shifts the emphasis away from Pamphilia's relationship with Amphilanthus, and directs attention to her relationship with aspects of herself as a lover.

Perhaps because she is concerned with constituting her self through trying to understand and re-negotiate her relationship with Love, the poems to Love mark many of the points in the sequence where she is not passive, internally darkened and victimised. Wroth's persona, although often forced to find ways around and through the traditionally masculinist nature of Petrarchanism, is not merely a victim, although at points she is victimised by the form she had inherited, by its traditionally masculinist objects and by her context which results in her need to hide her love. Many of Pamphilia's initial poems to Love are sonnets of negotiation, dissatisfaction, and sometimes anger. In addition, the sonnets in the *corona* within the sequence attempt to write an ideal world, ruled by an Ideal love, and are therefore an attempt to redefine Pamphilia's world. So Wroth does, as Dubrow points out, illustrate her poet's agency in the sequence,⁴ sometimes very strongly so when she argues with Love.

What and who Love is in the sequence changes as Pamphilia's tactics change. Initially, Love is a powerful although tyrannical ruler who abuses his position of power over Pamphilia. She expresses impatience towards her neglectful conqueror in many of the earlier sonnets, although in a way that almost always displays an awareness of the need to flatter and respect the ruling power that governs her. Love

³ In her "Introduction" to The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth, as well as in journal articles.

⁴ Echoes of Desire, 135.

moves in the sonnets from being addressed as the disembodied entity, to becoming an Anacreontic Cupid. This embodiment of Love has a classical, as well as a Petrarchan, history. A collection of late-classical lyric poems in Greek, called *The Greek Anthology*, was published in 1494. A second collection of poems, attributed to Anacreon of Teos, were published in 1554. It is from these two sources that the mythology of Cupid the boy-god and his mother Venus entered into Renaissance poetry. "What was serious human cruelty in the medieval Cupid becomes mischief in a small boy, and playfulness and whimsicality begin to dominate."⁵ We can see this whimsicality in Sidney's depiction of Cupid. In *Astrophil and Stella*, Cupid is the small boy who weeps when he is pushed off his mother's lap for disobeying her, breaking his bow and arrows in the process. "...his grandame *Nature* pittyng it,/ Of *Stella's* browes made him two better bowes,/.../ O how for joy he leapes, o how he crowes,/ And straight therewith like wags new got to play,/ Fals to shrewd turnes, and I was in his way" (s.17). He is "that murthring boy" (s.20), whose power is presented playfully, and as playful. The last two sonnets of Shakespeare's sequence also deal with Cupid, in two narratives. In 153 "Cupid lay by his brand and fell asleep" and in 154 the story is retold where "The little Love-God" has his "heart-inflaming brand" stolen by virgin nymphs. But in Wroth's poetry this small mischievous boy is most often also malicious in ways that are more dangerous. Pamphilia keeps warning that Love, even as a small boy, needs to be respected. The power Cupid has to harm, his easily-aroused anger, and his subsequent cruelty conclude the characterisation of Love at the close of the sequence; after the failed attempt to redefine Love in the crowne, Pamphilia returns to describing the Anacreontic Cupid in ways that emphasise his power to hurt.

A specific tactic Pamphilia uses to try and account for the way she is treated, is to blame not Amphilanthus for mistreating her, but Love itself. She can thus try to write her way out of her pain, because if it is Love's fault, and Love can be redefined, re-worded as merciful and glorious, purged of rash passion and made holy, pure and constant, then her situation, or her perception of her situation, can change. She threatens her disdainful beloved with Love's anger, if he continues to show disrespect to Love's subject, the lover. Pamphilia eventually attempts to create a new, ideal court

⁵ *The Development of the Sonnet*, 130.

of Love, where the chaste and constant love she opts for at the close of her sequence exists as the norm. This would free her from the flames of desire she unwillingly feels in the opening sonnet of the sequence, as well as from the jealous and voyeuristic world from which she finds herself having to protect herself.⁶

I will begin with the initial characterisation of Love as a warrior-king. Pamphilia's attitude to Love begins, as it remains, ambiguous. She commences her investigation of Love's nature by examining Love as a powerful ruler. She is clear about being at his mercy, under his control, but her tone often verges on the belligerent as she reprimands this ruler for not taking better care of his subject. She feels strongly the injustice of her situation. It is not being conquered that she minds as much as being ill-treated by her conqueror. It is in her relationship with Love the ruler, far more than in her relationship with her beloved, that she expresses anger and impatience, and makes demands. Love is initially reminded of his duty in the first part of the sequence. P3 begins with a conjunction; following P2's description of the beloved's shining, hurting, publicly-viewed eyes, Love is presented as an intermediary in the following sonnet. This serves to introduce the idea that Pamphilia's happiness depends not on her beloved but on Love itself: "Yett is ther hope: Then Love butt play thy part/ Remember well thy self, and think on mee;" (II.1-2) she says. She asks Love to "Shine in those eyes which conquer'd have my hart" (I.3) and to "Lodg in that brest, and pittie moving see" (I.5) thus making it Love's responsibility to engender affection in Amphilanthus. Since Love is one of the main characters in Pamphilia's world, and throughout the sequence is addressed directly (far more often than Amphilanthus is), the responsibility for reciprocal love is deferred from the beloved himself to the character, Love. Love will not come *from* the beloved, but will work its wiles *on* the beloved, in order for Pamphilia to be requited. She then proves herself a sincerely suffering lover, a true servant, and appeals to Love's sense of his responsibility towards his subjects.

⁶ If Love can be redefined, then Pamphilia need no longer be the unhappy lover of P1. She can become the calm, constant lover of the last sonnet of the sequence. Of course, the irony is that to deny the burning flames of Petrarchan desire is to deny Petrarchan writing as well, as is clear in the conclusion of the sequence, where the decision to be chaste results in the decision to be silent. It is thus no wonder that Pamphilia does not succeed in redefining Love in the crowne, since it is the very condition of constant struggle with Petrarchan Love that characterises her as a female Petrarchan lover. The only time she can ever resolve her relationship with Love is when she resolves not to write love poetry.

Watch butt my sleepe, if I take any rest
 For thought of you, my spiritt soe distrest
 As pale, and famish'd, I, for mercy cry;
 Will you your servant leave? Think butt on this;
 Who weares loves crowne, must nott doe so amiss,
 Butt seeke theyr good, who on thy force doe lye. (ll.9-14)

By asking Love to witness her suffering, Pâmphilia emphasises her conquered state. She is also asking for Love to remain true to his "servant," not to abandon her to her pain without first administering "mercy." It is Love's responsibility, as a king "wear[ing] loves crowne" to "seeke [the] good" of those who "lye" in his power. She effectively is asking Love to conquer Amphilanthus. In order to grant Pamphilia the mercy for which she cries, Love must make Amphilanthus his subject too. Love's power as a conquering king is thus emphasised, as is Pamphilia's need for his responsible attention.

In P8 Pamphilia reprimands Love for abusing his power over her. The political language she uses establishes the notion that she is a subject in a political context, as Love is characterised as a conquering general. The relationship in sonnet P8 is strictly between her and Love - no other third party is mentioned. Thus in many ways the political renegotiations exclude the beloved entirely, as Pamphilia has a particular discursive relationship with Love throughout the sequence that is more varied than her relationship with Amphilanthus. In this sonnet, the frustration she feels is caused by Love's blindness, and in being directed towards Love himself rather than towards her unrequiting beloved, impacts on her sense of self. She directs her recriminations towards Love, and thus towards her own emotion, since she is the lover who is affected by Love's blindness; she is the lover who has fallen in love with an unconstant beloved. Thus the blindness she says she despises is in many ways her own, and the conqueror-conquered relationship explored and in some ways undermined in this poem is also an exploration of the ways in which the boundaries between the external (Love the conqueror) and the internal (Pamphilia the conquered) collapse in on each other:

Love leave to urge, thou know'st thou hast the hand
 'T'is cowardise, to strive wher none resist:
 Pray thee leave off, I yeeld unto thy band;
 Doe nott thus, still, in thine owne powre persist,
 Beehold I yeeld: lett forces bee dismiss;

I ame thy subject, conquer'd, bound to stand,
 Never thy foe, butt did thy claim assist
 Seeking thy due of those who did withstand;
 Butt now, itt seems, thou would'st I should thee love;
 I doe confess, t'was thy will made mee chuse;
 And thy faire showes made mee a lover prove
 When I my freedome did, for paine refuse.
 Yett this Sir God, your boyship I dispise;
 Your charmes I obay, butt love nott want of eyes.

The typical Petrarchan imagery of war structures the logic of this poem's expression. Pamphilia "yeelds" to Love, telling him to dismiss his forces. Her situation - that of a "subject, conquer'd, bound to stand" contrasts with her tone. She smartly reminds the overzealous general that "'Tis cowardise, to strive wher none resist." She claims she was always an ally to Love, "Never thy foe, butt did thy claim assist." The turn in the sestet, on the conjunction "Butt," together with her throwaway "it seems" establishes her attitude as impatient or incredulous. Despite the fact that I have always been on your side, she says, despite your constant assaults on me, regardless, "thou would'st I should thee love." This can never be, for, while Pamphilia admits - "I doe confess" - that it was Love's attractions that made her willingly his slave, she scornfully tells him "your boyship I dispise;/ Your charmes I obay, butt love nott want of eyes." This concluding image is a surprise twist in the poem; the conquering general suddenly becomes a blind boy, and in the lack of a possessive pronoun in the final line, his blindness speaks for both himself and for Pamphilia's own emotional blindness. There is the suggestion that Pamphilia has been tricked into refusing her "freedome... for paine." It is not the true fairness of Love that attracted her, but his "Faire showes," his appearance of goodness and justice. In this sonnet, he is behaving neither fairly nor justly by continuing his assault against an already-conquered subject, which makes him a coward, because he is hurting her when she is bound and cannot defend herself, and because he is demanding that she should love her subjugated state. Her scornful "Sir God" sums up her attitude to this relentless ruler. I will obey you, but don't expect me to love a cowardly, blind child, she concludes. Through her disdain and impatience at his behaviour, expressed in a tone of playful disgust in the couplet, she claims the right to her own anger at the way she has been treated. However, since this sonnet details Pamphilia's frustration at herself, for being the lover who is hopelessly, unrequitedly, blindly in love, there is an irony in the anger she directs at her conqueror; it is, after

all, her own feelings that she is describing in this poem. Thus the language of conquest and subjugation is undermined by her tone, which impacts not only on her refusal to be meekly conquered by Love, but also on her sense of herself as a lover; it is because she loves that she belongs to Love. The blame she directs at the overzealous ruler comments upon her own condition as a lover who suffers Petrarchan (that is, often abject and unrequited) love. Thus, by addressing Love in an overtly impertinent tone in the couplet, and by the fact that it is her own love she is describing throughout anyway so the blindness she “love[s] nott” is in many ways her own, she reserves the right to agency over her feelings, even as she expresses the fact that she is slave to them.

Other sonnets also express this mixture of subjection to a ruler and threats that she will rebel against ill-treatment: “Lett nott the blame of cruelty disgrace/ The honor’d title of your Godhead, Love:/ Give nott just cause for mee to say a place/ Is found for rage alone on mee to move” (P12 // 9-12). Pamphilia is requesting a “place” other than “a place... for rage.” By asking this external entity in a carefully politic manner for a different kind of place, she is emphasising the way the private (her internal ‘place,’ as well as her emotion of rage and love) is constituted by the public (the whims of the externally constituted god, who himself is influenced by a public context where cruelty can become a “disgrace”). While her tone in P12 is more respectful - she says Love’s godhead deserves an “honor’d title” - she is also carefully reminding this god that she will have “just cause” to express rage if he does not treat her with the kindness his position demands. This is the language of politics, of public, external contexts, used to describe what is actually the lover’s own emotion. The internal is conceived of in terms of the dynamics of the public, political world.

Pamphilia is not always so accepting of her conquered state. In P16 she rails against having been overpowered by this irresponsible warrior-king.

Am I thus conquer’d? have I lost the powers
That to withstand, which joy’s to ruin mee?
Must I bee still while itt my strength devowres
And captive leads mee prisoner, bound, unfree? (// 1-4)

Pamphilia’s impatient questions are not purely rhetorical. While the answer to first, “Am I thus conquered?” may be yes, her cry, “Must I bee still while itt.../... captive leads me prisoner, bound, unfree?” is debated in the rest of the sonnet, where she

warns Love, and by extension, Amphilanthus, of her dissatisfaction with such an unhappy slavery. Before I will so meekly accept my fate, she says, the impossible will have to happen.

Love first shall leave mens phant'sies to them free,
 Desire shall quench loves flames, spring hate sweet showres
 Love shall loose all his darts, have sight, and see
 His shame, and wishings hinder happy howres; (ll.5-8)

When Love has no more arrows of power, and has seen and realised how shameful his behaviour has been, then will I quietly submit, Pamphilia asserts. Until then, she speaks the language of the political dissident:

Why should wee nott loves purblind charmes resist?
 Must wee bee servile, doing what he list?
 Noe, seeke some hoste to harbour thee: I fly
 Thy babyish trickes, and freedome doe profess; (ll.9-12)

But in a typical Petrarchan turn, she realises at the end of the sonnet that there is no escape for her. This confirms that, as a Petrarchan lover, she is bound to love forever, to which her pain, caused by unrequited love, testifies. She also emphasises that she is unhappy about having been so conquered by love.

Butt O my hurt, makes my lost hart confess
 I love, and must: So farewell liberty. (ll.13-14)

The couplet turns on the knowledge that as a lover she is completely at love's mercy. "I... must" love, she says, emphasising that as a lover she has no choice but to feel the emotion. This is actually a sentiment that renews her commitment to Amphilanthus. But because he has not been mentioned in her previous sonnets in which she discusses subjugation to Love, the poem becomes far more an expression of her political relationship with her ruler, Love. It is almost only by convention that the beloved has anything to do with her lover's state at all, since she is more concerned with attempting to resist her unfair enslavement to an irresponsible and "babyish" child. Until the couplet, the tone of the poem suggests she is not a passive sufferer, but a woman analysing her situation and expressing great discontent. The poem's overall effect conveys the sense that even when she realises she cannot escape, she does not have to like her conquered state, and affirms her right to her dissatisfaction.

One of the reasons why Love is an irresponsible ruler, as Pamphilia has already suggested in P8, is that Love is deceitful: "When hot and thirsty to a well I came/
Trusting by that to quench part of my flame/ Butt there I was by love afresh imbrac'd"
(*ll.*9-11). This conqueror-love takes advantage of Pamphilia's weakened, and
"trusting" state. Pamphilia does not ever renounce the claim that she was tricked. In a
later sonnet, she says, "I (ignorant) did grant and soe was bought,/ And solde againe
to lovers slaverie" (P72 *ll.*5-6). In P40 she says,

Soe Tirants doe who faulsly ruling earth
Outwardly grace them, and with profitts fill
Advance those who appointed are to death
To make theyr greater falle to please theyr will...
Hope kills the hart, and tirants shed the blood.
For Hope deluding brings us to the pride
Of our desires the farder downe to slide. (*ll.*5-14)

Pamphilia says that her act of hoping under the auspices of love was as fragile and as dangerous to her self as are the political advancements of a courtier hoping for the favour of a cruel ruler. False hope is like a tyrant who for his own cruel enjoyment will "Advance those who appointed are to death." By hoping for returned affection, by allowing her desire to grow, Pamphilia sets herself up for a fall, "For Hope deluding brings us to the pride/ Of our desires the farder downe to slide." So the promises made her by her hopes, like the promises made by Love as a ruling albeit unfair king, are expressed in the language of war and politics. This indicates that there are issues of power involved in any relationship with Love (and, presumably, by extension, with the beloved). Most importantly, however, an exploration of the lover's relationship with Love, and the Hope caused by Love, in such terms, indicates that Love is a social and political entity, not an emotion belonging to the sealed-off inner spaces of the lover's psyche. Indeed, there are no such spaces, since the politics, machinations and prohibitions of the public world influence, and indeed become the terms by which Pamphilia can describe, her inner turmoil.

Her dissent against Love's conquering nature is suppressed in only one poem to Love in the sequence. In P38, Pamphilia excuses Love for evoking precisely the sentiments expressed in P16. "Poore Love" (*l.*1) is asked, "Is itt because some say thou'art blind, that bard/ From sight, thou should'st noe hapines attend?" (*ll.*3-4). Love is still not bringing her happiness, but Pamphilia excuses Love because his

blindness, while it may affect his outward sight, does not affect his ability to influence the heart.

Who blame thee soe, smale justice can pretend
 Since 'twixt thee, and the sunn noe question hard
 Can bee, his sight butt outward, thou canst bend
 The hart, and guide it freely; thus unbard
 Art thou, while wee both blind, and bold oft dare
 Accuse thee of the harmes, our selves should find
 Who led with folly, and by rashnes blind
 Thy sacred powre, doe with a child compare.
 Yett Love this boldnes pardon: for admire
 Thee sure wee must, or bee borne without fire. (*ll.5-14*)

External sight belongs to the sun, and true blindness to the “wee” who “Accuse thee of the harmes, our selves should find.” True blindness here is associated with the “rashness” of denigrating Love’s “sacred powre” by comparing him to a child. In other words, this Love is not necessarily the same incarnation as the Anacreontic Cupid, and Pamphilia here objects to the trivialising of Love’s power when the harms that lovers bring on themselves are blamed on a childish and irresponsible Love. This is a direct contradiction of the sentiments expressed in other poems in the sequence, and as such contributes towards the impression that Pamphilia is investigating the various personas Love can assume. The holiness of Love’s “sacred Powre” in this sonnet anticipates the religious language experimented with in the crowne of Sonetts later in the sequence.

So although one of Love’s incarnations in the poetry is as the conquering and ruthless ruler, those complaints directed against him specifically for his mercilessness are complicated by the presence of a sonnet in this early section of the poetry that excuses his behaviour, and introduces the holy nature of his power. The tendency to rebuke Love as an irresponsible ruler, as well as her defense of Love in P38, both stress Pamphilia’s agency in her relationship with Love. Whether she is complaining or protecting, she is actively engaged in understanding her condition as a lover. It is thus via her relationship with Love that she can subtly express her dissatisfaction with Amphilanthus’s treatment of her. When she warns Amphilanthus that his disdainful behaviour should cease, she presents this as not for her sake but for Love’s. In one of the few poems where the beloved enters into Pamphilia’s discussions of Love as an entity, Amphilanthus’s bad behaviour risks antagonising the God:

Dearest if I by my deserving
 May maintaine in your thoughts my love,
 Lett mee itt still enjoy
 Nor faith destroy
 Butt, pittie love wher itt doth move,
 Lett noe other new love invite you
 To leave mee who soe long have serv'd,...
 Yett may you loves sweet smiles recover
 Since all love is nott yett quite lost
 Butt tempt nott love too long
 Least soe great wrong
 Make him think hee is too much crost. (P61)

Pamphilia stresses her constancy in this poem, calling herself "mee who soe long have serv'd." This emphasises her service not only to her beloved, but to Love himself. And Amphilanthus has risked losing Love's attention, since Pamphilia tells him "all love is nott yett quite lost." This could be a warning that despite her constancy, his behaviour risks antagonising the love she feels for him. And the love she feels is, after all, as much a character in the sequence as the beloved himself. Thus her moment of subtle warning to the errant "Dearest" is rechannelled into the character of Love. The poem's conclusion is a subtle admonition to someone who has shamelessly abused his power. However, this insensitive beloved is himself answerable to the Divine Rule of the God of Love. "Butt tempt nott love too long" is a warning against trying the patience of the controlling power in this poem: "Least soe great wrong/ Make *him* think *hee* is too much crost." Retribution, then, will come from Cupid, and Pamphilia can make this threat because of her close discursive interaction with the god of Love. Pamphilia has a certain amount of authority to speak for Love, since she is a lover. It is in her relationship with Love, as opposed to the beloved, that Pamphilia can express her claims for re-empowerment, can demand the attention she can only humbly ask for in other poems. Dubrow calls this strategy, the way in which Pamphilia refers Amphilanthus to Love, "passive aggressive."⁷ This is not to imply, I think, that Pamphilia is always passive, but that she channels her aggression in a particular way, making Love the punishing power here. She has to do this, partly because she cannot emphasise everlasting constancy while at the same time expressing the threat that continued abuse will result in her rage, possibly culminating in the desire to punish the

⁷ *Echoes of Desire*, 149.

man she has sworn to love eternally. Instead it is Love's office to punish those who do not respect his power. Also, since it is difficult for a woman in a public context (and Petrarchan poems are always to some degree invoking a public context) to express actively negative emotions, Pamphilia ensures that she is not breaking social rules when she warns that it is Love, not her - the gentlewoman, the princess - who will punish disdain.

Love's second major incarnation in Pamphilia to Amphilanthus is as the Anacreontic Cupid. While this character shares with the conqueror Love blindness and a tendency to act childishly, he also shares the access to great power which must always be respected, as Pamphilia confirms by the end of the sequence. So the two main identities given to Love, Cupid and warrior-king, do intersect. In P67 Love is a "... fond child, had hee had a care to save/ As first to conquer" (*ll.*9-10). This irresponsible young boy, like the warrior who in the earlier sonnets seemed fairer than he turned out to be in his actions, is a trickster, Loki-like. Sonnet P70, a narrative with a moral, tells how: "Poore Love in chaines, and fetters like a thiefe/ I mett led forthe, as chaste Diana's gaine" (*ll.*1-2). Diana vows "the untaught Lad" will receive no "reliefe/ From her" (*ll.*2-3). A dialogue ensues between Diana, goddess of chastity, and this unrestrained - untaught - youth who tries to equivocate his behaviour and effects.

She call'd him theife; with vowes hee did maintaine
 Hee never stole; butt some sadd slight of grieve
 Had given to those who did his powre disdaine,
 In which reveng, his honor, was the chiefe:
 She say'd hee murder'd, and therefor must dy;
 Hee, that he caus'd butt love: did harmes deny
 Butt, while she thus discoursing with him stood
 The Nymphs unty'd him, and his chaines tooke off
 Thinking him safe; butt hee loose, made a scofe
 Smiling, and scorning them, flew to the wood. (*ll.*5-14)

Cupid manages to trick Diana's nymphs, and proves her vow to show him no mercy a lie. His scoffing and scorning implies that he was not as innocent as he represented himself to Diana, but rather had acted the part of the meek child in order to effect his escape. Cupid explains the "grieve" he "Had given to those who did his powre disdain" as the righteous revenge necessitated by his honour at this disregard of his power. Pamphilia is always aware of Love's great power, and of his ability to exact

revenge, which is why she is at great pains to assure him of her conquered status even as she criticises. And when she does forget to pay the correct obeisance to Love's power, she is found out, and has to offer penance. This poem, P70, is the first of the sonnets that depict Cupid's trickery in such a mythological narrative, instead of in a discussion where Pamphilia acknowledges his ruling power over her even as she complains of his ill treatment of her. As such, it is the first of her tales that culminate in outright blasphemy, for which she is to pay later in the sequence. In P74 this depiction of him is continued:

Love a child is ever criing,
 Please him and he strait is flying,
 Give him hee the more is craving
 Never satisfi'd with having;
 His desires have noe measure,
 Endless folly is his treasure,
 What hee promiseth hee breaketh
 Trust nott one word that hee speaketh....
 Hee will triumph in your wayling,
 And yett cause bee of your fayling,
 Thes his vertus ar, and slighter
 Ar his guiftes, his favors lighter,
 Feathers ar as firme in staying
 Woulves no fiercer in their praying.
 As a child then leave him crying
 Nor seeke him soe giv'n to flying.

After having depicted this petulant, spoilt, lying, ravaging child with a short attention span, she goes on in the following song to warn against ever falling for, and in, love.

In the next poem, P75, she advises:

Beeing past the paines of love
 Freedome gladly seekes to move,
 Says that loves delights were pritty
 But to dwell in them 't'were pittty...
 But though his delights are pritty
 To dwell in them were a pittty.
 Let love slightly pas like love
 Never lett itt too deepe move
 For though loves delights are pritty
 To dwell in them were great pittty;
 Love noe pittty hath of love
 Rather griefes then pleasures move,
 Soe though his delights are pritty
 To dwell in them would bee pittty.
 Those that like the smart of love

In them lett itt freely move
 Els though his delights are pritty
 Doe nott dwell in them for pittty.

Through the simple refrain, Pamphilia denigrates love's delights as merely "pritty," and warns others against love - she is one of those who has felt the smarts of love and does not like them. Pamphilia has been actively disrespectful in the last few sonnets, which as a cluster presents Love first as a deceitful child and then culminates in warning others away from him. Indeed, Roberts calls the cluster of sonnets preceding the crowne "a full scale attack against the idea of the self-obsessed, infantile Cupid."⁸ Immediately, in the next sonnet, it appears that her ruler has noticed what she has been saying and has expressed his disapproval. This is the last sonnet before the *corona*, and Pamphilia asks for pardon for her offense, and promises Love a crowne of praise poetry in his glory. This radically ironises the whole project of the crowne. Read in context with the rest of the sequence (and not as a separate sequence in itself, as Roberts and Paulissen suggest⁹), the religious purity of the crowne becomes a politic penance of praise to a stern ruler who can, and does, inflict pain on his conquered subject, who was unwisely carried away in her dislike of her ruler's nature and said more than she should have. Her initial importuning has turned to treason, and now she has to quickly recover favour. So the *corona* as a whole can be read as a political tactic to save her skin from the angry ruler who can be capricious and cruel - especially since she explicitly refers to him as Cupid in this sonnet, thus invoking his boyhood persona directly:

O pardon, Cupid I confess my fault
 Then mercy grant mee in soe just a kind
 For treason never lodged in my mind
 Against thy might soe much as in a thought,
 And now my folly I have deerly bought
 Nor could my soule least rest or quiett find
 Since rashness did my thoughts to error bind
 Which now thy fury, and my harme hath wrought;
 I curse that thought, and hand which that first fram'd
 For which by thee I ame most justly blam'd,
 Butt now that hand shall guided bee aright,

⁸ "Lady Mary Wroth's Sonnets: A Labyrinth of the Mind" in *Journal of Women's Studies in Literature* 1.4 (1979), 326.

⁹ Roberts in "The Nature of the Poetry" in *The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth*, 44-5 and Paulissen in the Introduction to *The Love Sonnets of Lady Mary Wroth*, v.

And give a crowne unto thy endless prayse
Which shall thy glory, and thy greatnes raise
More then thes poore things could thy honor spite.

When Pamphilia promises to give Cupid a crowne, she is referring not only to the *corona*. She will also be making him king of his own court, where she tries to create an ideal courtly situation for herself as well. By turning king-maker, Pamphilia is taking the power-dynamic in her relationship with Love into her own hands, actively redefining him in a way that suits her. Although she constructs a courtly situation, where Love is the ruling power and all are subject to him, by writing her ideal world into existence Pamphilia may also be trying to re-make her interior space. If the world in which she must exist is itself constructed from her ideal fantasy, then she will have complete control over her internal world as well, since the public/private interaction will both originate from the self's ideal world. That the whole project has failure built into it, and fails to keep unwanted elements out of Love's ideal court, indicates once again that Pamphilia's internal realm can never escape the influences of the external context of the world in which she finds herself, even when it is precisely a new context that she is trying to write for herself.

"A crowne of Sonetts dedicated to Love" follows this dedicatory poem. The crowne has received the most negative critical attention of all Wroth's poetic writing. Spiller is scornfully dismissive: "Her competence is at times low - she has no idea how to write a *corona*-sequence,"¹⁰ and to Paulissen, who designates the crowne the third sonnet sequence of the four she sees in *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, the *corona* is "mannered and self-conscious and is preoccupied by form and variations of rhyme scheme."¹¹ This objection to the form results possibly because these critics are not reading the crowne as part of the sequence, as a marked tactic. The dedicatory sonnet, following as it does a series of poems that denigrate Love as a spoilt child, influences the poems in the crowne. By taking into account the way in which Love is presented after the failed project of the crowne, the obsessive preoccupation with interlinking sonnets is made explicable as a gesture of frantic praise. The *corona* sonnets are sometimes further obsessively linked by being monorhymed (P79 is an example, where

¹⁰ *The Development of the Sonnet*, 224.

¹¹ *The Love Sonnets of Lady Mary Wroth*, 69.

all the lines end on “might,” “white,” “light” or “requite”). Similarly, the desperate need Pamphilia feels to escape the labyrinth in which she finds herself at the *corona*’s inception is formally articulated.¹² If we read it as an attempt to extend the debate of the effects of love on the lover, “concatenation suggests both stasis and change... The effect of stasis is appropriate to the subject of undying love.” Dubrow believes that the linked first and last lines are formally and thematically successful, providing a sense of order and controlled process to the closing of one sonnet and the opening of another.¹³ Similarly, Jones says the “architectural conceit” of the crowne serves in the interlinked first and last lines to “establish fearful curiosity as the condition of the female lover.”¹⁴ In addition, the fact that the first and last lines are the same emphasises the contradictory nature of the corona. This is because the circular motion established by the sonnets’ formal interdependency ensures that Pamphilia is left in the “same fearful perplexity” with which she began.¹⁵ So the entire project of the *corona*, to both praise and create a court of ideal love, is undermined by its circular form.

The *corona* form of the crowne draws attention to Pamphilia’s ambivalence about her position as a lover, and about the nature of the ruler she attempts to idealise. The ambivalence extends into the very project of the crowne, the way in which it tries to redefine love, because if we read the prefatory sonnet as commenting on why she writes it in the first place, it ironises all her praise. Similarly, the ambivalences of the project erupt in the language of the crowne, as the supposedly ideal courtly context cannot avoid the language of politics or of violence. This is accounted for by the fact that the *corona* takes place in a court, where hierarchies and power are an intrinsic element, and because in an attempt to create an alternative public world to the world of watching eyes in the rest of the sequence, the ideal court must always refer to and thus be tainted by, the politics of the earthly court world in the rest of the sequence. Jones calls the *corona* “a public pageant”¹⁶ and as such it must always have the same elements of judgment implicit in any public pageant. There is also an underlying spirit of rejection within the ideal happiness and heavenly love in

¹² Roberts finds the theme of obsession to be a central one in the sequence as a whole. See “A Labyrinth of the Mind,” 324.

¹³ *Captive Victors*, 214-215.

¹⁴ *The Currency of Eros*, 151.

¹⁵ *The Currency of Eros*, 152.

¹⁶ *The Currency of Eros*, 151.

the *corona*, in the ways that Pamphilia attempts to reject what she defines as inappropriate to her ideal courtly love. She tries to redefine the hierarchy to which she is subject, and in which she has suffered, in the rest of the sequence, by putting her own king on the throne of an ideal world. In other words, Pamphilia tries to write herself the right to decide who should be punished for their behaviour, and the behaviour she will not allow in her ideal court is the behaviour of those who have victimised her in her other sonnets. The language to which she has to resort in order to define the rules of her ideal court often reveals the struggles of power and the necessary violence that enforcing correct codes of conduct entails. The crowne is not just a progress from earthly to divine love (as Beilin suggests) “but its setting and vocabulary also suggest that its fantasy of fulfillment is a courtier’s fantasy, and not an entirely happy one.”¹⁷

By virtue of its form the fantasy cannot be entirely happy. The corona has failure, irony and ambivalence built into it, formally and thematically; if it begins with the lover in a maze, because it links formally back to that beginning, she must end in the maze as well. And thematically its project is an attempt to do penance for her disrespect, and an attempt to create an ideal court where Pamphilia’s perfect Love-king reigns. However, in any courtly situation, the ruling monarch must maintain power over various factions who in turn are seeking to empower themselves over each other. Pamphilia’s attempts to create a perfectly just ruler within a perfectly just court, where power would not need to be a contested issue, inevitably show the strain of trying to forge an ideal Neoplatonic environment that would not need to exclude or deny, within the constraints of a court and its politics. It is thus not surprising that the sequence is a circle, taking both reader and speaker back to the beginning at its end. Despite its vigorous attempts to create another, preferable Love and another, preferable court, the *corona* ends in stasis. The lover is well and truly lost, unsure of where to turn or what to do, and in deep emotional trouble.

The first sonnet sets the scene and suggests one of Pamphilia’s projects in the corona, which is to write her way out of the maze in which she finds herself (the other, of course, is to mollify an angry Cupid). This maze is not only a “labyrinth of

¹⁷ The Currency of Eros, 151-2. For the reference to Beilin I am indebted to Jones.

the mind,”¹⁸ not just an internal labyrinth, but representative of the difficulties Pamphilia faces as a desiring female subject in her socio-cultural, external, world as well. No matter which way she goes, she will be lost, unless she can create an ideal Love that will allow her access to its glories in a way that will ennoble (and not degrade) her, and an ideal world in which to experience this Love.

In this strang labourinth how shall I turne?
 Wayes are on all sides while the way I miss:
 If to the right hand, ther, in love I burne;
 Let mee goe forward, therein danger is,
 If to the left, suspition hinders bliss,
 Lett mee turne back, shame cries I ought returne
 Nor fainte though crosses with my fortunes kiss;
 Stand still is harder, although sure to mourne; (ll. 1-8)

The monsters that lurk in Pamphilia's labyrinth are familiar: burning flames, danger, suspicion, shame and mourning. She is caught as much in the world outlined in her sonnets as she is in her internal labyrinth of the lover's pain. Dubrow points out the pun in "labourinth," which suggests not only Pamphilia's entrapment but the hard work she has to undertake in order to try and change her situation.¹⁹ In this first sonnet of the *corona*, which is P77 of the sequence, she sees a thread, like Theseus's in the Minatour's maze, and follows it as her only hope for a way out of her situation: "Yett that which most my troubled sence doth move/ Is to leave all, and take the thread of love" (ll. 13-14). Pamphilia follows this thread into the next sonnet, and into her attempt to redefine love in a way that will alter her situation; if she can make her ruler into the kind of ruler she desires, and if she can create a court that is the context she would choose for herself - instead of the watching spiteful jealous eyes with which she is surrounded in the rest of the sequence, where she herself is so often jealous as the lover of an unconstant beloved - then she will have a solution to her pain and a way out of her labyrinth. However, to follow the thread of Love in order to escape the labyrinth of Love is at best a tricky enterprise, and at worst a futile one. In order to provide the way out, the thread itself should come from outside the maze. So the solution Pamphilia attempts to write for herself in the *corona* has implications for the whole sequence, and the fact that it fails indicates Pamphilia's entrapment in her lover

¹⁸ "A Labyrinth of the Mind," 323.

¹⁹ *Echoes of Desire*, 152.

status, an entrapment which ends as unhappily as it began - the burning Petrarchan heart marked in the dream of P1 only finds relief when the debates with and around love are renounced in P103.

The thread of love Pamphilia picks up in P77 takes her into the following sonnet, P78, "Which line strait leads unto the soules content/ Wher choyse delights with pleasures wings doe move,/ And idle phant'sie never roome had lent"(ll.2-4). This can be read as flattery to the angry Cupid, as well as an attempt to create such an ideal space. In terms of what has gone before in the poetry, it is certainly not true that love has lead straight to Pamphilia's soul's content. She has had not "choyse delights" but torments and misery, and has been subject to the "idle phant'sie" of the watching eyes at great length and in great detail in the preceding sonnets.

Nevertheless, Pamphilia embarks, in the second sonnet of the *corona*, on an attempt to create the ideal religious Love she has asked for throughout the rest of the sequence, and has been unsuccessful in attaining. She does this by offering a definition of this ideal love:

Love is the shining starr of blessings light;
The fervent fire of zeale, the roote of peace,
The lasting lampe fed with the oyle of right;
Image of fayth, and womb for joyes increase.
Love is true vertu, and his ends delight; (ll.9-13)

Pamphilia mixes the language of religion - blessings, zeal, faith and right - with Petrarchan images. "Love is the shining starr" of Petrarchan ideal beauty. The two discourses - ascension to a holy plane through gazing and being gazed upon by an ideal light - come together in a Neoplatonic Christianity. The images cross over each other and intertwine like the concatenation of the corona. The "Light of true love" (l.7), that Petrarchan ideal, is placed together with the burning fires that here become the "fire of zeale." The "lasting lampe" that sheds the light of love and Goodness, and whose image stresses the viscosity of praise poetry, which relies on the light of the beloved's eyes and true goodness to reflect redemption back on the praiser, combines Petrarchan ideals with religious gestures. This Petrarchan lamp is fuelled by the religious "oyle of right." All these images are taken up throughout the rest of the corona, as is the idea of a womb (here a gestation space for "joyes increase") - but the womb becomes one of the strongest images for the ambiguity of Pamphilia's project,

as her need to create a perfect court for a perfect ruler conflicts with what has been said about love and about her public context in the rest of the sequence.

In P79, Love becomes the ideal sun-king Amphilanthus was in earlier poems. "... noe clowde can apeere to dimm his light" (l.3) in this ideal place. He is just, and so recognises all she has been desiring in the rest of the sequence. Pamphilia's rage at the way she has been treated previously finds an outlet in the *corona*, which ironically invokes images of purity and holiness. In this ideal court:

Heere are affections, tri'de by loves just might
As gold by fire, and black deserned by white,
Error by truthe, and darknes knowne by light,
Wher faith is vallwed for love to requite, (ll.5-8)

All the things Pamphilia has spoken about before as adversaries are here put in their places - blackness and night are banished by love's perfect sun-light, error is revealed by the Light of Truth shed by this ideal ruler, faith is valued, and love is required. Similarly, as Pamphilia goes on to say, the "briers of jelousie shall heere miss wellcomnes" (P84 ll.7-8).

The ruler described in this sonnet is the opposite of the Love warned against in P75: "Please him and serve him, glory in his might/ And firm hee'll bee.../.../Just as truthe, constant as fate, joy'd to requite" (ll.9-12). However, this just and fair ruler may not be as perfect as the poem strives to present him. The refrain established by the rhyme scheme suggests a less certain message: "might white light requite" problematises the notion expressed in the poem itself that the blinding white light of true love *will* be requited in this ideal court.

P80 continues the idea of the light of love, and mixes Christian ideology with Neoplatonic unity, all in the context of the pagan God-king. The strange amalgamation further hints at the ambiguity of Pamphilia's project:

And bee in his brave court a gloriouse light,
Shine in the eyes of faith, and constancie,
Maintaine the fires of love still burning bright
Nott slightly sparkling butt light flaming bee
Never to slack till earth noe stars can see,
Till Sunn, and Moone doe leave to use dark night,
And secound Chaose once againe doe free
Us, and the world from all devisions spite...
To taste this pleasing sting seek with all care
For hapy smarting is itt with smale paine,

Such as although, itt pierce your tender hart
 And burne, yett burning you will love the smart.

The courtier who will be a “glorouse light/ Shin[ing] in the eyes of faith” is a courtier who is both Petrarchan and religious. Similarly, the court of an ideal Cupid - a pagan mythological character - is subject to the Christian teleology which will culminate in a “secound Chaose.” Pamphilia’s promise that love’s “hapy smarting is... smale paine” rings hollow given her own experiences outlined in the sequence at large, and especially considering the context of the crowne itself - where the courtier-lover is praising the ruler-love, and will thus say whatever is necessary to make him sound glorious. Pamphilia’s expressions of the happy pain of love, the notion that love results in a “pleasing sting,” a “hapy smarting” that is “smale paine,” and the assurance that “burning you will love the smart,” are typically Petrarchan. Petrarch’s oxymorons characterise the idea that Love’s pain is pleasant suffering for the lover. This idea describes the experience of the lover always asking for respite from the pain of unrequited desire, which he is happy to suffer until such time as he is requited. This oxymoronic state is thus the condition in which the Petrarchan lover begins, and from which he asks to be saved through his beloved’s pity. Pamphilia does not view this painful happiness as the state from which relief will eventually be gained, however. Instead, she posits this oxymoronic state as the ideal end-point for the lover in Love’s perfect court. Burning in love is not the state to be transcended, but the state to be desired. So it is the condition of being a Petrarchan lover, feeling specifically Petrarchan pain, upon which Pamphilia focuses. The ambiguity of the oxymoronic experience of Love as both pain and joy, as well as the counter-Petrarchan need to stay always in this state, expressed by invoking Petrarchan language, enhance the sense of ambiguity in this sonnet as a whole. This ambiguity is drawn out by the mention of a “tender heart” being “pierced,” a painful image that hearkens back to Pamphilia’s first encounter with Cupid in P1, where he impaled her heart. She awoke from that dream hoping it would depart, and it is a cause of lamentation for her then that “O mee: a lover I have binn.” Here, again, as she does so often in the *corona*, she asserts the opposite of what she repeatedly says in the rest of the sequence, that “yett burning you will love the smart.” Once again, Pamphilia is positing the Petrarchan experience of the suffering but ecstatic lover as the Ideal experience of Love. The act

In P82, Love performs precisely the Neoplatonic task of bringing the lover to knowledge of herself through unity with her beloved:

Hee may owr profitt, and our Tuter prove
 In whom alone wee doe this power finde,
 To joine two harts as in one frame to move;
 Two bodies, butt one soule to rule the minde;
 Eyes which must care to one deere object bind...
 Itt doth enrich the witts, and make you see
 That in your self, which you knew nott before,
 Forcing you to admire such guifts shoulde bee
 Hid from your knowledg, yett in you the store;
 Millions of thes adorne the throne of Love,
 How blest bee they then, who his favours prove.

The ideal court is full of "millions" of ideally unified lovers. Thus the ideal situation Pamphilia sets up here, which is the opposite to the situation she has encountered in the rest of the sequence where she was alone in being a true lover, is comprised of everyone in the court replicating her ideal situation. Pamphilia is writing herself a community of true lovers, and thus attempting to write herself out of her isolation. It is significant that even here, in this perfect court of love, Amphilanthus is not mentioned by name. Presumably, Pamphilia's unity of "Two bodies, butt one soule" assumes that the second body in her situation is Amphilanthus. However, he is linguistically absent since the presence of his name - the lover of two, he who scatters light all around - would shatter the ideal unity of the one soul in two bodies, which is the result of perfect union. Another reason he is absent in the *corona* is that this collection of sonnets is a courtly attempt to garner favour with a ruler, and as such is addressing the relationship between Pamphilia and Cupid. The praise of Cupid as a holy king has to do with Cupid's power, not directly with Amphilanthus. The odd situation of Love assuming its own disposition in a Petrarchan sequence that separates Love from the beloved is taken to its logical extreme in a subseries of poems where the beloved is entirely excluded.

The ideal community of lovers "adorne[s] the throne of Love." The lovers are ornaments that bespeak his glory and power. This image, of millions of bodies affixed to Love's throne like jewels, again highlights Pamphilia's attempt to praise - praise poetry is after all concerned with ornamenting the recipient with words. And the connection between praise and Petrarchan poetry, and love's involvement in them

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both, is brought out in the next sonnet, where Love makes the lover into the perfect Petrarchan poet:

Love will a painter make you, such, as you
 Shall able bee to drawe your only deere
 More lively, parfett, lasting, and more true
 Then rarest woorkman, and to you more neere (P83 ll.9-12)

And, just as Petrarchan poetry seeks to bring the lover to himself through his love for the beloved, "Hee that shunns love doth love him self the less" (l. 14).

This language of ideal love, ideal courtly context and ideal Petrarchan poetry cannot weave an ideal fabric of words. In P84, Pamphilia curses the person who does not admire this ideal, unifying, illuminating Love. "... cursed hee whos spiritt nott admires/ The worth of love" (ll.2-3). The entrance of curses - which, when uttered by a woman belong to the realm of black magic and witchcraft, and not this ideally fair, religiously-oriented and perfectly happy court - jars the context of ideal blessedness and goodness. Even a bishop, cursing in the name of his god, only curses that which is dangerous or threatening. Together with words like "burden" and "forced," and the image of tender hearts being pierced just as the bodies of lovers are affixed to Cupid's throne in previous sonnets, the appearance of the fear behind a curse must serve to undermine the sense of Love's perfect and ideal power. No matter how hard Pamphilia tries to create the perfect space in which to be a lover, there are still threatening elements to her world. Indeed, it is the dangerous and unwanted elements that make the ideal world possible to define in the first place. But just as no world can be ideal precisely because it cannot exclude its opposite, just as no space can be only internal without being constituted by the external, so Cupid cannot exist without Venus - as his mother, and as the desire that is part of the experience of love.

In Sonnet P85, rending the ideal fabric further, Venus erupts without warning into the perfect court, bringing with her all the base aspects of desire Pamphilia has tried to exclude.

... Venus follyes can noe harbour winn
 Butt chased ar as worthles of the face
 Or stile of love who hath lasivious binn.
 Oure harts ar subject to her sunn; wher sinn
 Never did dwell, or rest one minutes space;
 What faults he hath, in her, did still begin,
 And from her brest hee suckd his fleeting pace,

If lust bee counted love t'is faulcely nam'd
 By wikednes a fayrer gloss to sett
 Upon that vice, which els makes men asham'd
 In the owne frase to warrant butt begett
 This childe for love, who ought like monster borne
 Bee from the court of Love, and reason torne. (ll.2-14)

The statement that "sinn/ Never did dwell" in Cupid sounds hyperbolic, given the difficulties Pamphilia has had in the rest of the sequence. And the statement, which wants to function as praise of an ideal ruler who, in this fantasy context, can be made into a Cupid that never did sin, is complicated by the rest of the poem. The lines following the claim that Cupid has always been free of sin are, "What faults he hath, in her, did still begin,/ And from her brest hee suckd his fleeting pace." So there is a contradiction in first asserting that there is no sin in Venus's son, not even for "one minutes space," and then immediately excusing "What faults he hath" as having come from his mother's milk. Despite her best attempts, Pamphilia cannot purge love of lust, cannot maintain an ideal chaste desire.

Pamphilia's vehemence against Venus manifests in the sudden violence of the couplet. A child of lust, conceived from "wickednes" and "vice," is called a child of love as a tactic of the lustful "which els makes men asham'd" to "warrant" the child what it actually is. This false child has no place in court of ideal love, and should be "torne" away, "like monster borne." This is an image of extreme violence and unnaturalness, invoking as it does a kind of aborted monstrous birth. But Love himself is child of Venus, and may have suckled some lust from her - and the phrase "This childe for love" is ambiguous enough to make it initially unclear which child - the supposedly sin-free, or the monstrous - is being referred to. There could be the suggestion that the ideal child suckled on Venus's lust has the potential for turning into this monstrous false child of love, in the conflation of the two. Certainly all the elements that Pamphilia wants to keep out of this ideal court dominate the third quatrain - lust, wickedness, vice and shame.

P86 talks of the politics of love's court.

... Love in reason now doth putt his trust...
 Reason advisor is, love ruler must
 Bee of the state which crowne hee long hath worne
 Yett soe as neither will in least mistrust
 The government wher noe feare is of scorne,

Then reverence both theyr mights thus made of one, (*ll.* 2-9)

There is a coalition between love and reason that has to take steps not to be betrayed by its government. So this ideal court contains no strife or scorn amongst its powers-that-be. But by mentioning the governing body of this court, Pamphilia has emphasised the nature of ruling power, which relies on concord between factions. Similarly, the discussion of this ideal leadership begins with, and is thus based on, the fact that Love puts his trust in reason. But trust can be betrayed, as so often happens to Pamphilia in the sequence as a whole, and specifically in her interactions with love. And although there is no breakdown of trust in this poem, it nevertheless ends on discord, just as the poem before it had:

Butt wantones, and all those errors shun,
Which wrongers bee, impostures, and alone
Maintainers of all follyes ill begunn;
Fruit of a sowre, and unwholsome ground
Unprofitably pleasing, and unsound. (*ll.* 10-14)

Wantoness, error, wrongers, impostors, maintainers of follies fill the end of a sonnet about trust and ruling concord. The monstrous child has become unwholesome fruit, and P87 picks up this negative momentum and expands it. The body of the poem is of very different matter to the holiness and goodness and purity of love's court:

Unprofitably pleasing, and unsound
When heaven gave liberty to frayle dull earth
To bringe forth plenty that in ills abound
Which ripest yett doe bring a sertaine dearth.
A timeless, and unseasonable birth
Planted in ill, in wurse time springing found,
Which hemlock like might feed a sick-witts mirthe
Wher unruld vapors swimm in endless rounde,
Then joy wee nott in what wee ought to shun
Wher shady pleasures showe, butt true borne fires
Ar quite quench'd out, or by poore ashes wunn
Awhile to keepe those coole, and wann desires.
O noe lett love his glory have and might
Bee given to him who triumphs in his right.

The notion of monstrous birth and unwholesome fruit is expanded here into "a timeless and unseasonable birth." There is the suggestion that all kinds of life on earth "in ills abound," and the unnaturalness of the earth's spawn, "which ripest yett doe bring a sertaine dearth" becomes cause for the other contradictions in the poem. The

life on this earth, "planted in ill," is poisonous ("hemlock like") and uncontrolled ("unruld vapours swimm in endles rounde"), and offers only concomitantly poisonous and uncontrollable joys, which bring no true pleasure - "Then joy wee nott in what wee ought to shun." These "shady pleasures" do not allow for the "true borne fires" which Pamphilia has been praising in the *corona*. Thus the whole of this sonnet is concerned with how the earth ought not to be, but is, in comparison with love's ideal court. And the violence and disgust evoked in Pamphilia in the preceding sonnets erupts into a description of all she despises. These conditions, however, are presented as characterising life on earth, and indeed have been seen to predominate in the world outside this ideal court. It is clear that Pamphilia cannot keep her ideal realm clear of the presence of all she wishes to purge from it, which is all with which she must contend in the rest of the sequence. Negative elements - unnatural love, pain and death - that have made an appearance throughout the *corona* gather momentum and explode into full expression in this sonnet. The plea in the couplet - "O noe lett love his glory have and might/ Bee given to him who triumphs in his right" - becomes Pamphilia's plea for herself, but is inadequate to reclaim the space violated by the "Unprofitably pleasing and unsound" love described in the body of the sonnet.

After the schism in this poem which culminates in a vision of all the evil that the earth can bring forth, Pamphilia reasserts the calm of love's perfection in P88 and P89, and reaffirms that there is a place for ideal lovers: "And who soe give them selves.../ Thes hapinesses shall attend them still/ To be suplyed with joys, inrichd in mind/ With treasures of content" (P88 ll.9-12). The language suggests that reward will take the form of gain that is linked to commercial worth; the true lover who submits to love's power, will be "inriched.../ With treasures." That these treasures are jewels of the mind does not detract from the sense that reward comes from obedience. This is still a courtly situation where power must be maintained and thus obedience will be rewarded and disobedience punished with banishment to the evil world outside. Thus the very operations of power that Pamphilia bemoans being victim to in the rest of the sequence, where she who does not operate according to the rules is made to suffer, are replicated in this ideal court. In order to ensure that the just are rewarded, the evil must be punished. There is rage and revenge suggested in the creation of a space where Pamphilia's loving personality is the ideal, and thus all those who are not like her, and who did not appreciate her in past sonnets and songs, are

excluded into the unnatural and monstrous world outside. (This has ambiguous implications for Amphilanthus, who has been equally responsible for making Pamphilia suffer through his inconstancy). In P89 Pamphilia pledges herself to Love:

To thee then lord commander of all harts,
 Ruller of owr affections kinde, and just
 Great King of Love, my soule from fained smarts
 Or thought of change I offer to your trust
 This crowne, my self, and all that I have more
 Except my hart which you beestow'd beefore. (ll.9-14)

In keeping with the fact that she is both creating and maintaining an ideal court, and offering this creation as penance to an angered ruler, this poem speaks in the courtier's language. Praising the power of the "Great King of Love," Pamphilia offers her poetry - that is, her project of praise - and her loving self to his trust (and Love, in his other incarnations, has never proved mindful of this trust, being untrustworthy himself). And so the whole project is torn apart by the last sonnet of the *corona*, which qualifies the actions of the Great King of Love and proves Pamphilia has failed to find her way out of the labyrinth.

Except my hart which you beestow'd before,
 And for a signe of conquest gave away
 As worthles to bee kept in your choyse store
 Yett one more spotles with you doth nott stay...
 Yett other mischiefs faile nott to attend,
 As enemies to you, my foes must bee;
 Curst jealousie doth all her forces bend
 To my undoing; thus my harmes I see.
 Soe though in Love I fervently doe burne,
 In this strange labourinth how shall I turne?

The repetition of the last line of the preceding sonnet with qualifying information serves to invert the praise implied in the offering of P89; Pamphilia gives Love everything in trust except her heart which she has given to him already and which, as she goes on to say in this next sonnet, he has not valued. This does not imply much hope for what worth he will place on her poetry and her self. The Great King of Love Pamphilia has laboured so hard to construct in her labourinth has failed her. Jealousy has not been banished from this court despite all Pamphilia's attempts. There is the suggestion that Jealousy is as powerful a monarch as Love, because Love's ideal court does not offer protection from "curst jealousie[']s)... forces." On all counts: in her

relationship with her ruler (who considers her heart “worthles” despite the fact that it is the purest and most worthy of all the hearts in his possession, since “one more spotles with you doth nott stay”), in her context (the ideal court had failed to protect her, and is not more powerful than jealousy), and in her personal space (she ends the *corona* anticipating her “undoing” and “harmes”), Pamphilia is back where she started. There is always the possibility that the jealousy she despises and that so threatens her is her own, and thus she always carried within herself the seeds of her own undoing when she attempted to create an ideal space free from jealousy. In Pamphilia’s exploration of the externalisation and attempted perfection of Love, there are no clear sustainable boundaries between the internal private spaces of the lover’s self and the projection of her Love as an external entity, influenced by the world in which she must function and by which her experience of self and other is constituted. The last line of the *corona* leads her back to the first line of the first sonnet in the crowne, formally echoing her entrapment. As the *corona* form, which has circularity built into it suggests, Pamphilia may not be trying to free herself altogether. Dubrow points out that Cupid’s refiguring as a monarch draws attention to the way Pamphilia rejects one notion of Cupid to worship another. “In the crown sequence she delightedly accepts subjection to a different version of the god of love,” so ultimately Pamphilia is trying not to escape the labyrinth but to subject herself to a “higher, better authority.”²⁰ Even this attempt fails, however, and thus the crowne itself, as well as the contradictory moments within its sonnets themselves, serve to reassert Pamphilia’s ambivalence and skepticism about love.

Pamphilia’s skepticism is clear in the sonnets about love that follow the *corona*. Love becomes the Anacreontic Cupid again, with definitively malicious intent. He is not merely the small “murthring boy” who is mischievous, however, but a powerful force easily roused to anger, with painful results. In keeping with the style in which Cupid was presented earlier, the remaining poems about Cupid take the forms of mythological narratives, as opposed to monologues addressed to the warrior king. In P92 Cupid retains his status as “The Monarck of loves crowne” (l.4). But, as the child, he is also “All naked and playing with his wings/ Within a mirtle tree” (ll.5-6). Nevertheless he still retains the vestiges of the power of the ideal ruler. In P92, he “for

²⁰ *Echoes of Desire*, 149-150.

honor first was borne,” but when mocked he cannot control his rage. He is seen by “Sweet Silvia” and her “faire Nimphs” as he plays, “Which sight a soddaine laughter brings/ His godhead soe to see” (ll. 7-8).

When hee perseaving of theyr scorne
Grew in such desp'rate rage
Who butt for honor first was borne
Could nott his rage aswage;
Till shooting of his murdring dart...
Did through a poore nimph pass...
Take heede then, nor doe idly smyle
Nor loves commands despise
For soone will hee your strength beeguile
Although he wants his eyes. (ll. 13-28)

Cupid does have real power, even as a little naked child, and is clearly still dangerous. The narrative has a moral, as in the last verse Pamphilia warns the reader, “Take heede then,.../.../For soone will hee your strength beeguile.” Cupid may be blind, but he is not to be underestimated. Love may not be an ideal ruler, but he is one that must be respected nonetheless.

P96 is the last poem about Cupid, and restores him firmly to the little capricious child, who betrays and deceives. Pamphilia finds him in the forest, “Colde, wett, and crying” (l. 2). She helps him, listening to his complaints as she dries him. Hoping for some return for her service, she is rudely reminded of love’s duplicitous and ungrateful nature:

I glad was of his finding, thinking sure
This service should my freedome still procure,
And in my armes I tooke him then unharmde,
Carrying him safe unto a Mirtle bowre
Butt in the way hee made me feeble his powre,
Burning my hart who had him kindly warmed. (ll. 9-14)

In Pamphilia to Amphilanthus Love is initially a conqueror king, overzealous and unfair. Then love becomes Cupid, a capricious and traitorous boy. Both personas share an enormous power, as well as an unreliable nature. With the crowne of sonnets, Pamphilia tries a very different tactic in an attempt to redefine Love, that itself is fraught with contradictions as she strives to regain the favour she has lost through her treasonous depiction of Love without respect. But the rents in the fabric of her idealising language appear throughout the crowne. Finally Pamphilia returns to the

notion of Love as Cupid, when it is clear she cannot escape love's pain, nor the context of her world where true love cannot exist without jealousy (her own, and others'). The Anacreontic Cupid who ends the sequence retains the negative characteristics that had made Pamphilia impatient with Love throughout the sequence, but he is nevertheless a small boy who must be respected. Roberts sees Wroth's investigations of the two personas of Cupid as resulting in the conclusion that the "traditional" representations - "the mischievous blind boy and the noble, absolute ruler" - are "one-sided projections, both incomplete and misleading." Roberts also views Pamphilia's struggles with love as resulting ultimately in a moral lesson, where Pamphilia learns through her suffering to appreciate "a finer type of love" than the obsessive and painful love she has explored throughout the sequence. The final sonnet then becomes a renunciation of "earthly passion" and a turning towards "heavenly love."²¹ This reading, however, allows a sense of resolution to Pamphilia's conflicts with the god Love that is not securely expressed in the poems, and overlooks the complications incurred by heavenly love being linked to chastity, and, ultimately, silence.

Marotti details how the sonnet had always been used to transform "self esteem and ambition into love," and thus "Sequences of lyric poems in the Petrarchan mode are mini-utopias."²² Although the utopias Marotti is referring to are "imaginative heterocosms within which ambitious men could fantasize a kind of mastery they lacked in their actual experience,"²³ Wroth uses the Petrarchan form for similar purpose in her *Crowne*, where she embarks on a project of attempted remastery of Pamphilia's situation by trying to remake Love in the image of a kind, good, Neoplatonic god. Her project fails however and she ends up where she started - just as lost, and, as the poems that come after the *crowne* suggests, just as at the mercy of a capricious and dangerous child rather than a rational and glorious ruler. Still, Pamphilia's tone with Love when she is reprimanding him in his conqueror persona, and her attempts to write a new reality for herself, are indications of her active moments of agency in the sequence. Wroth has not created a poetic subject that is entirely at the mercy of Petrarchan vicissitudes, but a female lover who is often

²¹ "A Labyrinth of the Mind," 326-7.

²² "'Love is not Love,'" 398.

²³ *Ibid.*

determined to find a way to make her service to her difficult lord Love easier on herself, and, when she cannot, she expresses her rage at being so treated in clear, although politic, terms. The fact that these terms need to take socio-political reality into account, as well as the fact that Love is personified as an external entity that can be addressed in such terms, have important implications for the lover's relationship with Love. The lover's internal experience of her emotion is never free of the constituting influences of her external reality. There is no such thing, in Pamphilia's relationship with Love, as a completely internal space. Furthermore, because she is a female lover, there are elements to her Love that are proscribed by her world. The relationship of the lover to her Love is complicated by the interrelationship of public and private, as is the relationship of the lover's loving self to the public spaces of her socio-political world. Wroth's Pamphilia is not only a woman hiding from the watching eyes of those around her. She is also a lover actively engaged in trying to understand her condition, and in using her words to attempt to redefine her internal and external realities.

Conclusion

Wroth's Pamphilia to Amphilanthus was the first Petrarchan sonnet sequence written by a woman in England. There are thus certain differences in her writing, both in the ways in which she uses Petrarchanism, and in the ways in which she encounters it as a traditionally specific form - the ways in which it wants to use her. These differences are a result of the gender of both the writer and her persona, Pamphilia. There is a persistent sense in many of Wroth's critics that she was engaged in creating something new, something different, by virtue of her gender:

Particularly her poetry reveals an attempt to offer a radically different voice and perspective to the traditional form of the sonnet sequence. By introducing a female persona, she reversed the typical roles of lover and beloved, in which the woman served as a radiant, but passive object of man's desire.¹

Pamphilia, as the first English female Petrarchan poet, thus challenges the gender roles in the Petrarchanism Wroth had inherited. Dubrow warns against essentialism in discussing Petrarchanism, particularly for feminism, which has tended to account for gender differences in sometimes simplistic and problematic ways.² While the form is a complicated and complex one, which had assimilated many different elements by the time it reached England, it had been used there for writing love poetry only by men, and in ways that had specific gender consequences, by the time Wroth inherited it. The Petrarchanism that Pamphilia encounters in her poetry was therefore in some ways traditionally monolithic. This is not to suggest that the genre could not be used to speak female desire. That it is not masculinist by nature, that it can accommodate a female voice, is clear in the fact that Wroth wrote a Petrarchan sequence. However, Pamphilia has particular difficulties by virtue of her gender, in trying to enter for the first time what had become a traditionally masculinist form. I hope to have avoided the charge of essentialism by stressing that subjectivity is a matrix in which gender is one element, and also by emphasising that there can never be any such thing as one version of female experience. Pamphilia is not *the* female poetic subject, who can therefore be opposed to *the* male subjectivity expressed in Petrarchanism. Rather, Wroth creates one particular response to a multi-faceted discourse that for convenience sake has been designated masculinist. The term by no means implies a

¹ "A Labyrinth of the Mind," 320.

² Echoes of Desire, 147.

homogenous male voice either. I wish also not to deny the complex potentials of Petrarchanism, but rather to have looked at what happens when Wroth's female poet, in the context of a particular class situation, with her gender difference (and its implications) from canonised English male Petrarchan poets, encounters traditional aspects of the form as the first English female writer of poems of Petrarchan love, with its concomitant sexual and political desire.

I have tried to make a case for taking the gendered implications of particular generic usages, as well as the implications of gender to the subjectivity matrix, into account, which many critics of Wroth are still not doing either when they approach the poetry or when they speak critically to their readers. This is true despite the fact that most critics writing on Renaissance scholarship, particularly in connection with issues of subjectivity, are affiliated with what Neely calls the "new" scholarship; that is, criticism concerned with social, historical and linguistic workings of power. So certain critics need to cease from making the oppressive assumptions behind such statements as Spiller's, that the sonnet as form developed into a genre whose /I/ is "a voice that can speak for every reader about every reader."³ This posits male subjectivities as universal subjectivities, by assuming that the usually objectifying and silencing discourse which was common to Petrarchanism (in the specific ways in which it had been used to reflect a male poet's identity back at himself as an ideal unity, at the expense of a female beloved constructed as an ideal body), can speak sufficiently for all subjectivities regardless of gender, class, race and other constituting elements of subjectivity.

Wroth's contribution is beginning to be recognised, but she is still sometimes being valued as an imitator, and not as a creator of new aspects of the Petrarchan form. Paulissen says:

In verse form and Petrarchan imitation Lady Mary Wroth's verse resembles the verse of Sidney; in its utilization of classical modes, her verse resembles Jonson's; in the new way of writing and reaching beyond Petrarch and in the realization of a paradoxical world, her poetry is like Donne's; but, in the conceptualization of her poetry and in the revelation of her philosophy of love, Lady Mary's sonnets are most like Shakespeare's.⁴

³ The Development of the Sonnet, 37.

⁴ The Sonnets of Lady Mary Wroth, 65.

All of this may be true, despite its sometimes arbitrary designation of attributes to writers whose work often encompasses the elements assigned to others - does not Sidney's *Astrophil* reach beyond Petrarch in important ways, for example? But we need to stop valuing Wroth in terms of her *being like* the male canonised writers, and view her work as a significant achievement in itself, especially considering the many ways in which Pamphilia to Amphilanthus reveals the gendered workings of Petrarchanism in some ways, and stretches the genre in others. In other words, Wroth needs to stop being read, as she still is by some critics, as Lady Mary, solely inheritor of the Sidney tradition, and start being read as an important writer. She ventured into the forbidden territory of public, political commentary, breaking the oppressive rules laid down for women by the theories of gender appropriateness of the time, and she expanded the Petrarchan form to include aspects of female differences as speaking poetic subject.

According to the social-sexual rules of her time, Wroth's life, as much as her writing, was transgressive. While the relationship of theory to praxis remains uncertain, the gender climate of the time did have oppressive and silencing rules which many male theorists, educators, religious leaders, leaders and writers were loudly advocating women should follow. The very presence of so much literature denying female agency and speech may be an indication of the presence of female activity outside the domestic sphere; nevertheless, the furor surrounding the publication of Wroth's Urania, and the terms in which Denny censured her, are proof that it was not acceptable for women to comment publicly on political events. The many apologies appended to published translations and religious verse, themselves considered fit subjects for women to write about, but to write about privately, are indicative of the difficulty women had in being regarded as fit subjects to publish in the first place.

Wroth's particular use of Petrarchanism betrays many of the difficulties her persona had to face when writing in what had always, in England, been a masculinist preserve. The ways in which English Petrarchanism sought to define its subject and object were specifically gendered in its assumptions about who could speak, to whom, and for what purpose. The drive towards self-definition which is an object of praise poetry in general, and of Petrarchan love poetry in particular, created many problems for a female persona. These problems partially account for, as well as respond to, the intensely internal, private nature of Pamphilia's Petrarchan speech. However, the

notion of an isolated, internal space is itself complicated in Wroth's poetry, as the interior spaces Pamphilia creates are influenced and constituted by the rules and prohibitions of the outside world. It is because Pamphilia is a female Petrarchan lover in the repressive gender climate of her time that she encounters difficulties when she attempts to express her love publicly.

Pamphilia does speak desire, as well as resistance to her suffering, albeit in specific ways. Wroth's Pamphilia is not a victim of a monolithic masculinist discourse, but finds ways to work around and through many of the assumptions of Petrarchanism as she had inherited it. The expression of Petrarchan desire is complicated in Wroth's sonnets, as the subject position of the actively desiring self was a difficult one for women - either within Pamphilia's context or within Wroth's - to assume unproblematically. That Pamphilia can eventually only reconcile her desiring suffering with the end of her sonnet sequence, with her silence, does not only speak some of the problems facing the first female Petrarchan lover in English. It also marks a site of self-reclamation, as Pamphilia chooses to retain control over herself as a woman. To refuse to allow herself to become sexually conquerable is to assert her right to control the circulation of her body, which she does through her commitment to constancy. The man to whom she commits herself is absent linguistically and as a created subject in the sonnets, and therefore cannot be a referent in her poetry. In Pamphilia's situation, her beloved is never available to her as a reliable source of self-definition or as a beloved who safely can represent bliss almost about to be achieved, since he is always the unconstant, untrustworthy, lover of two, the he-who-scatters-his-light-all-around. He cannot become a source of Neoplatonic Light and Goodness, showing the way to ideal unity of self for the lover. Therefore constancy to a beloved who can never be achieved results in a commitment to chastity.

Because of his textual and emotional absence, Amphilanthus does not function as the source of the poet's self-definition. This is despite that fact that he is better than the sun, that his eyes are the typical Petrarchan shining stars. The traditional Petrarchan beloved is the wellspring of the Light of true Beauty and Goodness who, by shining on the poet, will help him to knowledge of Truth, and therefore ultimately, himself. However, Pamphilia's beloved cannot be the source of such self-illumination. Instead, his gaze, which is vitally important to Pamphilia as the food upon which she relies, serves to emphasise the darkness of her own interior spaces, her inner rooms.

She is plunged into the darkness of deprivation by his absence. And just as he cannot be relied upon to be a gazer, Pamphilia cannot unproblematically gaze on him either, because she cannot afford to be seen to gaze in the context of the world of watching eyes that fill the poetry.

The issue of context is an important one for Pamphilia, as for all Petrarchan poets, but in ways that mark both the world of her poems and her position in it as being affected by her gender. She is aware of being perpetually observed in a world that does not value her true, constant love, since the eyes watching her are jealous and spiteful. Moreover, the external world of the poems is a world of deceit, where lust masquerades as love and truth is not valued. This is another reason why Wroth's poet cannot safely express her desire, and cannot afford to be caught out as she gazes on her beloved. A woman who is tricked into impropriety, and is observed to be doing so, risks losing her respectability, a problem whose implications are entirely different, if not altogether absent, for a male Petrarchan lover.

One site within the sequence that allows for much negotiation, and the expression of socially designated 'unfeminine' emotions such as rage and resistance, is Pamphilia's attempts to negotiate her position with Love itself, and her expressions of disgust and impatience at its treatment of her. Love can serve as an intermediary between Pamphilia and Amphilanthus, thus taking the responsibility for Pamphilia's suffering. By attempting to redefine the nature of Love, by trying to write her way into an ideal courtly world, Pamphilia demonstrates not only her agency as a loving self, but the importance of political power in the sonnet sequence. This notion of the interaction of love and power is explored in another way in the sequence, because of Wroth's externalisation of the emotion of Love. Love's is not only a fire burning in the lover's heart, but is also a personified character, exerting an influence on her from outside herself. Therefore the external influences of a socio-cultural reality are shown to affect the lover's internal spaces. The private is at least partly constituted by the public, and Pamphilia's internal space certainly is not free of the influences of the gazing world which is so present in Wroth's sonnets.

Wroth's poetry, like her life, speaks the problems that existed for women writers during the Renaissance. However, her sonnets also demonstrate ways to begin forging a different kind of subjectivity within Petrarchan poetry, a subjectivity whose major difference is that of gender. Wroth shows how, even when a subjectivity is

gendered as female and forced into a certain relationship with the public world as a result, there are no purely internal spaces. Private, hidden spaces are still constituted by the politics of the public world. As such, Wroth's poetry complicates the notion of female subjectivity being created in a purely internal space, cut off from the external public world. She does not create a definitive female poetic voice - as there is no such thing - but her poetry speaks many of the differences and difficulties that arise when a woman writes in a culture and a form that complicate the notion of female speech.

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